

SOUTH SEA BUBBLE

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Also by
NOËL COWARD

COLLECTED SKETCHES AND LYRICS
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QUADRILLE
RELATIVE VALUES

SOUTH SEA BUBBLE

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

NOËL COWARD



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CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

JOHN BLAIR-KENNEDY (Bossin)

CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER MORTLOCK (A.D.C.)

SIR GEORGE SHOTTER (Governor of the Samolan
island)

LADY ALEXANDRA SHOTTER (his wife)

PUNALO ALANI (father of Hali Alani)

SANYAMO (a butler)

EDWARD HONEY (the Colonial Secretary)

CUCKOO HONEY (his wife)

ADMIRAL TURLING

MRS. TURLING (his wife)

ROBERT FROME (the Chief of Police)

HALI ALANI

The action of the play passes on the island of Samolo, a British possession in the Pacific Ocean.

Time: The Present.

ACT I

Scene I. *The verandah of Government House. Evening.*

Scene II. *The same. A few minutes later.*

ACT II

Scene I. *The same. A few hours later.*

Scene II. *Hali Alani's beach house. Later the same night.*

ACT III

Scene I. *The verandah. The next morning.*

Scene II. *The same. A few hours later.*

South Sea Bubble was first produced in London at the Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue on 25th April, 1956. It was presented by H. M. Tennent, Ltd., with the following cast:

JOHN BLAIR-KENNEDY

CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER

MORTLOCK

SIR GEORGE SHOTTER

LADY ALEXANDRA SHOTTER

PUNALO ALANI

SANYAMO

EDWARD HONEY

CUCKOO HONEY

ADMIRAL TURLING

MRS. TURLING

ROBERT FROME

HALI ALANI

ARTHUR MACRAE

PETER BARKWORTH

IAN HUNTER

VIVIEN LEIGH

ALAN WEBB

WILLIAM PEACOCK

JOHN MOORE

JOYCE CAREY

NICHOLAS GRIMSHAW

DAPHNE NEWTON

ERIC PHILLIPS

RONALD LEWIS

*The play directed by WILLIAM CHAPPELL
with settings by PETER SNOW*

ACT I: SCENE I

The Verandah of Government House, Pendarla.

On the audience's Left are double doors leading to the hall and the main living-rooms of the house. On the Right, the verandah continues at an angle. At the far end of this angle, out of sight, there are steps leading down into the garden.

The view of the bay and the mountains is spectacular and the tops of tropical trees and foliage can be seen below the verandah rail. The verandah is furnished with luxurious garden furniture in bright colours.

When the Curtain rises it is evening, a little while before sunset.

CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER MORTLOCK, the Governor's A.D.C. comes on, followed by JOHN BLAIR-KENNEDY.

CHRISTOPHER is a nice-looking young man in the late twenties. BLAIR-KENNEDY (Boffin) is a novelist of some repute. He is an attractive man and might be anywhere between thirty-five and forty-five.

CHRISTOPHER: I expect you'd like a drink before you see your room?

BOFFIN: I most certainly should. I'm still shaking like a leaf after that landing.

CHRISTOPHER: Coming in over those mountains is always a bit tricky.

BOFFIN: It's an eccentric little airfield, isn't it? The first one I have ever seen with corrugated runways.

CHRISTOPHER: H.E.'s been agitating for them to do something about it for months. The Samolans aren't very good at engineering.

BOFFIN: So it would seem.

CHRISTOPHER (*at the drink table*): What would you like? There's gin, whisky, rum or kala-kala.

BOFFIN: What's kala-kala?

CHRISTOPHER: It's a sort of native vodka. They make it out of plantain roots. They tread the roots into a pulp which they mix with coconut water and then ferment the whole thing.

BOFFIN: I think that for the moment I would prefer some ordinary whisky that nobody's trodden on. I don't believe in going native too soon.

CHRISTOPHER: Right. (*He proceeds to mix a whisky and soda.*) Lady Alexandra will be furious that your plane was on time. She hoped that it would be delayed so that she could get to meet you herself.

BOFFIN: It was a sweet thought, but one more hour with all those vomiting Chinese children and I should have shot myself.

CHRISTOPHER: Children are a nuisance in a plane, aren't they?

BOFFIN: Frankly—yes. These, being Chinese children, were a little special. Their general behaviour convinced me that all that well-known Oriental imperturbability must be a habit acquired in later life.

CHRISTOPHER (*banding BOFFIN his drink, then glancing at his watch*): The Women's Federation meeting must

be over by now. She should be here at any minute.

BOFFIN: She has to do a great deal of that sort of thing, I suppose?

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, yes. She made a flying tour of all the other islands a few weeks ago—no less than twenty-nine speeches in four days, it was a terrific success. At one place they nearly tore the aeroplane to pieces just before the take-off.

BOFFIN: Very gratifying. Have you been out here long?

CHRISTOPHER: Three years. I was here with Sir Hilary and Lady Blaise for the last part of their term.

BOFFIN: What were they like?

CHRISTOPHER: Quite nice really, but a bit sticky. Sir George and Lady Alexandra are very different.

BOFFIN: Is Sir George popular?

CHRISTOPHER: He's wonderful on the administrative side, down-to-earth and no nonsense. The Samolans like that. They don't quite approve of his politics of course, but they respect him all the same.

BOFFIN: I gather that this island is a Conservative stronghold.

CHRISTOPHER: On the whole, yes. There are some subversive elements of course, but most Samolans are still Empire minded. You see they've been happy and contented under British rule for so many years that they just don't understand when they're suddenly told that it's been nothing but a corrupt, capitalist racket from the word go.

BOFFIN: I trust that it is not His Excellency who tells them that.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh good Lord, no. But he is a bit

Leftish in his views, isn't he? In the nicest possible way of course.

BOFFIN: Of course.

CHRISTOPHER: And sometimes, some of the things he says, sort of shakes 'em up a bit. If you know what I mean.

BOFFIN: I do, I do, indeed, I do.

CHRISTOPHER: The Samolans are sweet people, in many ways and they have a lot of charm but they're a bit backward politically.

BOFFIN: Like the Irish.

At this moment, SIR GEORGE SHOTTER comes in from the ball. He is a cheerful man of about fifty. His figure is stocky but in good order. He exudes friendliness and is far from being a fool.

GEORGE: Boffin! I thought I heard the car—why didn't somebody tell me. *(He shakes hands with BOFFIN.)* How was the flight?

BOFFIN: Ghastly.

GEORGE: It's generally a bit bumpy between here and Yara. Have any trouble coming in?

BOFFIN: Yes. We bounced like a tennis ball.

GEORGE: It's that damned runway. They just won't fix it.

BOFFIN: I shall leave by sea.

GEORGE: You can't talk about leaving when you've only just arrived. Did the Press get you at the airport? They've been ringing up all day.

CHRISTOPHER: Wheeler was there from the *Examiner*, and poor old Kabu-Anu. Mr. Blair-Kennedy said he'd give them interviews tomorrow morning.

GEORGE: We don't often have celebrities on this island. I'm afraid you'll have to do your stuff to a

certain extent. You won't mind, will you?

BOFFIN: That 'certain extent' has a sinister ring. What have you been up to?

GEORGE (*airily*): Nothing much—ask Sandra—she has it all taped.

BOFFIN: Oh God!

GEORGE: Cheer up. A lecture or two here and there never hurt anybody.

BOFFIN: A lecture or two! You know perfectly well I couldn't give a lecture if my life depended on it.

GEORGE: Nonsense.

BOFFIN: It isn't nonsense. I can't even say a brief speech of thanks without stammering and stuttering and making a cracking fool of myself.

GEORGE: The Samolans will love that—they're very easily amused.

BOFFIN: Perhaps they'd like me to do a few conjuring tricks.

GEORGE: You're a famous author and all famous authors are expected to give lectures as a matter of course. If you're smart enough to write all those damned words it oughtn't to be all that difficult to spout a few of them.

BOFFIN: I'll never forgive you for this, George, or Sandra either.

GEORGE: Well, you fix all that up with her, it's nothing to do with me.

BOFFIN: I am not going to give any lectures, George and that's final. I am willing to agree to a couple of Press interviews, I might even consider reading a short address over the local radio but beyond that I will not budge.

GEORGE: You'll have to open the new wing of

the University Library whether you like it or not.

BOFFIN: I do not.

GEORGE: It's all laid on for Tuesday the twenty-fourth.

BOFFIN: Then it must be all laid off again.

GEORGE: They're offering you a degree.

BOFFIN: I don't want a degree.

GEORGE: Give him another drink, Chris, he's getting petulant.

At this moment LADY ALEXANDRA SHOTTER comes in at a run. She is exquisitely dressed, gay, charming, and at the moment, rather breathless. She flings herself at BOFFIN and bugs him.

SANDRA: Oh darling Boffin—I can't believe you're really here at last—I've been counting the days, so has everyone else for the matter of that—the whole island is an absolute uproar about your arrival. And there was I in the middle of that beastly meeting and unable to get to the airport. I've been in a frenzy—I heard your plane fly over the institute and I nearly lost control and rushed outside to wave—and then, to my horror, just as everything was finished, that awful Mrs. Paouna got up—you know, George, the one with the goitre the size of a grape fruit—and she droned on and on for ever like a buzz saw. Chris dear, for Heaven's sake give me a straight kala-kala with ice. (To BOFFIN.) How was the flight?

BOFFIN: Unspeakable.

SANDRA: And how was England when you left?

BOFFIN: Bathed in sunshine as usual.

SANDRA: Did you see Marjorie?—Is it true about Bertie and Freda? And how is Sylvia's baby?

BOFFIN: Yes—No—Hideous.

SANDRA: There are a million things I want to ask about—I don't know where to start.

GEORGE: Press on, my love. You're not doing badly.

CHRISTOPHER (*giving her a glass of pink liquid*): Here's your drink, Lady A.

He goes.

SANDRA (*as he disappears*): Thank you, Chris. (*She sips her drink and looks at BOFFIN and GEORGE.*) That's better. You look rather dim, Boffin—— Has George been bellowing at you?

BOFFIN: No. Just giving me a brief outline of my itinerary.

SANDRA: Oh George, you promised to leave that to me. (*To BOFFIN.*) There's nothing to worry about, really there isn't—just one or two tiny appearances here and there—for the sake of morale and prestige more than anything else. You see we've only had two English writers out here in three years and both of them were Rosita Forbes.

BOFFIN: I am not going to give any lectures, Sandra.

SANDRA (*gaily*): Of course you're not—whoever suggested such a thing—lectures are Hell. I wouldn't let you give one even if you were aching to.

BOFFIN: Good.

SANDRA: One or two little cosy informal talks perhaps about the state of the modern novel or the Sitwells or something——

BOFFIN: No, Sandra. No little cosy informal talks about the state of anything whatever.

SANDRA: You'll have to open the new wing in the University Library whether you like it or not.

BOFFIN: As far as I am concerned, Sandra, the new

wing of the University Library will remain for ever bolted and barred.

SANDRA: But they're planning to give you a degree.

BOFFIN: I don't care if they're planning to give me a Peerage. The answer is No.

SANDRA: This is all your fault, George. You jumped at him before he had time to get his breath and now he's dug his feet in.

BOFFIN: I certainly have.

SANDRA: Old Professor Wali-Anu will be heart-broken.

BOFFIN: He'll have to rise above it.

SANDRA: I simply can't face him with the news that you won't come after all the trouble he's taken. He absolutely worships everything you've ever written.

BOFFIN: Then he must be a very immoral old gentleman.

SANDRA: As a matter of fact I think he is rather, but all the students adore him.

GEORGE: Think it over, Boffin, my boy. The Pendarla University may not mean much in your life, but it stands for a great deal out here. It has carried aloft the torch of English learning through the jungles of heathen ignorance for generations—it has——

SANDRA: Don't overdo it, darling, it was only built in 1909.

BOFFIN: You had no right to arrange things like that without consulting me first.

SANDRA: How could we possibly consult you? You've been slipping about the Pacific for months. Besides, it's perfectly natural that whenever someone as famous as you comes to an out of the way place like this that we should want to make much of you. It's a

tremendous compliment really and you ought to be very proud, instead of turning up your nose and being pompous.

BOFFIN: All right—all right—have it your own way.

SANDRA: Oh that's wonderful of you, and I take back what I said about you being pompous. I didn't mean to let you in for a lot of nonsense, really I didn't, but it would help us so tremendously if you'd co-operate just a tiny little bit.

BOFFIN: No lectures.

SANDRA: We'll discuss those later.

BOFFIN: There will be none to discuss.

SANDRA: Darling Boffin—we'll see.

BOFFIN: I've come out here with a purpose, Sandra, and that purpose is to collect data and make notes for a satirical novel about British Colonial Administration.

GEORGE: Not too satirical, I hope, Boffin. I don't want to be forced to resign.

BOFFIN: And I really can't waste time making a series of personal appearances like a movie star. I want to relax and absorb atmosphere and find out about things and talk to people.

SANDRA: That's exactly what we're asking you to do.

BOFFIN: Yes, but not about the Sitwells.

SANDRA: It doesn't necessarily have to be about the Sitwells. What's the matter with the Brontës?

BOFFIN: A great deal I should imagine, judged from the standpoint of modern psychology, but I don't happen to be particularly interested in them. What I am interested in is what's going on here, on this island, this remote, far-flung outpost of Empire.

GEORGE: Commonwealth.

SANDRA: As a matter of fact, it's not nearly as far-flung as it used to be, all the principal trans-Pacific airlines call here, and in a year or two, when we get the jet planes, we'll be as get-at-able as Wimbledon.

BOFFIN: Have I made myself clear?

SANDRA: It's no use, George—we shall have to give in. No lectures.

BOFFIN: Thanks.

SANDRA: You'll have to put up with a bit of lionising, though. A couple of cocktail parties and one literary lunch—how's that?

BOFFIN: All right.

SANDRA: At any rate, you won't have to worry about dinner tonight. It will be as dull as ditchwater.

BOFFIN: I can't wait.

SANDRA: We thought you'd like to be quiet on your first evening.

BOFFIN: I'm surprised that you hadn't organised a civic reception.

SANDRA: Don't be mean. After all, you've won, except about the University Library. As a matter of fact, we ought to have asked the Professor tonight, George—but Cuckoo's always so beastly to him.

BOFFIN: Who's Cuckoo?

SANDRA: Cuckoo Honey. She's the wife of the Colonial Secretary. I don't suppose you'll take to her, nobody does much at first.

BOFFIN: Why?

GEORGE: She's a rather over-typical Colonial type—Anglo-Indian background, you know—prides herself on saying what she thinks.

SANDRA: Poor Cuckoo. It's the mixture of Bangalore

and Earl's Court that makes everything so difficult really, but she's not bad once you get below the surface.

BOFFIN: I'll wear an aqualung.

SANDRA: Her husband's quite sweet and a great help to George, but he has asthma.

GEORGE: Hay fever.

SANDRA: Well, whatever it is, it makes him rather snuffly. Then there are the Turlings. They're a sort of institution on the island. He's a retired Admiral and they've lived here for years.

GEORGE: He's an amiable old snob, a pushover for a title. Talk about your aunt, Lady Gravesborough—she was a Marchioness, wasn't she? He'll eat out of your hand.

BOFFIN: I'm not sure that I'd quite want him to do that.

GEORGE: Well have a try anyway—you see—it'll work like a charm.

BOFFIN: There's nothing much to say about my aunt really, except that she died of drink in San Remo.

SANDRA: That's all except for the Chief of Police and Hali.

BOFFIN: What's that?

SANDRA: It isn't a thing, darling, it's a political leader. He's the head of the P.I.P.

BOFFIN: What does that mean?

GEORGE: People's Imperial Party. They're very powerful and, to my way of thinking, damned retrogressive.

SANDRA: George naturally supports the S.S.N.P. The Samolan Socialist Nationals. I did so hope that when he gave up politics and became a Governor that he'd stop being a man-of-the-people, but he hasn't quite.

GEORGE: I'm proud of being a man-of-the-people.

SANDRA: You're a rip-snorting old careerist, darling, and you always have been ever since you left that dreadfully over-publicised grocer's shop in Huddersfield.

GEORGE: Never you mind about Huddersfield.

SANDRA: I don't very much.

BOFFIN: What does the S.S.N.P. stand for?

GEORGE: Self-government for the native population and Dominion status.

BOFFIN: Are they ready for that yet?

SANDRA: That's the whole point. Hali-Alani says they're not and Koga-Swalu says they are.

BOFFIN: Who the devil is Koga-Swalu?

SANDRA: The Opposition leader, and I must say he's a horror. Covered in warts and stinks like a badger.

GEORGE: Come now, Sandra, fair's fair, he can't help that.

SANDRA: Oh yes, he can. He could wash more to start with, and have his warts treated with what d'you call it acid.

BOFFIN: Is he coming to dinner too?

SANDRA: No, thank God, he came last week. We have to have them alternately. Whenever they meet they snap and snarl at each other and the servants get jumpy and hand people all the wrong things. Of the two I naturally prefer Hali. He's frightfully good-looking in rather a bogus sort of way—you know—long coffee-coloured hands and gleaming teeth. George can't stand him.

GEORGE: It isn't him I object to, it's his politics.

SANDRA: Hali's political views are perfectly sound. He just doesn't believe in progress. Personally, I find it very refreshing. He's also absolutely devoted to me and

pays me the most lovely compliments. Naturally I'm on his side through thick and thin.

GEORGE: You know, the trouble with you, love, is that you talk the most arrant nonsense.

SANDRA: Be that as it may, Hali is a very fascinating man, and even though you do say you wouldn't trust him an inch . . .

GEORGE: I wouldn't trust any of them an inch. Hali is a tricky proposition, fascinating or not, and so is his father who's a mischievous old intriguer. They can both make a lot of trouble with the elections coming on in a few weeks' time. I'm depending on you to see that they don't.

SANDRA: On me? You must be out of your mind. What on earth could I do?

GEORGE: Charm Hali. Get round him. Persuade him to change his views, or at least to modify them. You're an attractive woman, aren't you? Trained in the old-world school of aristocratic diplomacy?

SANDRA: All I ever learned at Roedean was the school song. I might sing him that. It's very rousing.

BOFFIN: That's a thoroughly immoral suggestion, George.

GEORGE: I don't see why. I should be the last to underrate the importance of woman's influence on politics—if properly directed.

SANDRA: "Disguise our bondage as we will, 'tis woman, woman rules us still," Thomas Moore. Born 1779. Died 1852.

BOFFIN: Good Lord, you can still do it!

SANDRA: "Thro' all the drama—whether damned or not—Love gilds the scene, and women guide the plot".

BOFFIN: Congreve?

SANDRA: No. Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Born 1751. Died 1816.

GEORGE: Don't encourage her for heaven's sake. She'll go on for hours.

SANDRA: I do it better really when I'm in my cups. How would you like me to begin, George?

GEORGE: Begin what?

SANDRA: Influencing Hali, of course. I'm entranced with the whole idea. Shall I lure him into the garden in the moonlight and pop a tuberoses into his buttonhole and murmur loving little slogans about the Samolan Socialist National Party?

GEORGE: Don't rush it. Get him in the right mood first.

BOFFIN: This may end in tears.

SANDRA: But I don't approve of the S.S.N.P. I think they're a lot of stinkers.

GEORGE: That's neither here nor there. I do approve of them, and you are representing me.

SANDRA: Oh George, how sweet and generous of you. Am I really?

GEORGE: None of that sarcastic stuff, now. You're my wife, aren't you?

SANDRA: Yes dear, but I hoped that it was a love match and not a political gambit.

GEORGE: You're my helpmate. You share my joys and sorrows. You smooth away my cares with your gentle womanly hand——

BOFFIN: "When pain and anguish wring the brow, a ministering angel thou".

SANDRA: Sir Walter Scott. Born——

GEORGE: Never mind about Sir Walter Scott for the moment, dear. Just concentrate.

SANDRA: All right. But I draw the line at the Samolan Socialist Nationals.

GEORGE: You want these island people to have the right to govern themselves, don't you? To emancipate themselves from the hideous yoke of Imperialistic oppression—to be free to shoulder the responsibility of their own destiny?

SANDRA: You know perfectly well I don't want any such thing. Neither do they.

GEORGE: I suppose you'll be saying next that they're perfectly happy as they are.

SANDRA: But they are—blissfully. They sing from morning till night. They weave away and make the most lovely waste-paper baskets and never stop having scads of entrancing children who swim before they can walk and have enormous melting eyes like saucers. And whenever they feel a bit peckish all they have to do is to nip a breadfruit off a tree or snatch a yam out of the ground.

GEORGE: What about education?

SANDRA: Well, what about it? They learn automatically all they need to know. They hunt and dive and swim and fish and make the most wonderful things with their hands. You can't do anything with your hands. You can't even mend the gramophone.

GEORGE: So we're back again at that, are we?

SANDRA: And as for swimming. (*To BOFFIN.*) Have you ever seen George swim? He goes churning up and down doing a sort of Margate breast stroke.

GEORGE: I like to see where I'm going. What's the fun of having your head under the water all the time?

BOFFIN: I must say I'm on George's side there.

GEORGE: Anyway, what's my swimming got to do with self-government?

SANDRA: Everything. It gives you an inferiority complex and your inferiority complex makes you have the wrong views. I've always said that, ever since I married you. You've no idea what the tiniest little inferiority complex can do to people. I've been reading all about it in an American book about sex.

BOFFIN: All American books are about sex.

SANDRA (*pursuing her theme*): Look at the Kaiser and his withered arm and all the trouble it caused? And Marat with that awful skin disease, and Richard the Third and his hump. I believe there was something rather peculiar about Saint Teresa too, but I can't remember what it was at the moment.

GEORGE (*patiently*): Listen, my love. All I asked you to do was to use your well-known woman's wiles discreetly and coax Hali Alani round to being a little more progressive in his ideas. I didn't look for an unprovoked argument about inferiority complexes, Richard the Third's hump and my swimming.

SANDRA: Never mind, darling. I'll do what you say. It's against my principles but I'll try my best. How far would you like me to go?

GEORGE: On second thoughts, I'd rather you didn't say anything at all. You'll only bewilder him and make matters worse.

SANDRA: Nonsense. I'm all set now. I intend to fascinate him within an inch of his life. And if it ends in the divorce courts you have only yourself to blame. You'd better have a notebook handy, Boffin. This evening might turn out to be an eye-opener for the Colonial Office.

GEORGE: Sandra—listen——

SANDRA: Not another word. The die is cast.

CHRISTOPHER *comes in, having changed for dinner.*

Oh Chris, how correct of you to be dressed so soon. I knew this would happen and it's all my fault. Deal with everyone for me and for Heaven's sake tell Sanyamo to tidy the verandah, it's a shambles.

CHRISTOPHER: I've already told him. Everything's under control.

SANDRA: What about the appetizers?

BOFFIN: What a disgusting word!

SANDRA: Yes, isn't it? I know a lot of others too. They're all part of the progressive modern trend. I can say 'Lounge' and 'Phone' and 'Let's have a small one before we buzz'.

CHRISTOPHER: Punalo Alani is here, Your Excellency. He says he has an appointment.

GEORGE: Damn! I completely forgot he was coming. Is he in the office?

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, sir.

GEORGE: Well, I'll see him out here, it's cooler. You show Boffin his room, Sandra. I shan't be long.

SANDRA: Can't we stay a minute? I should love to show Boffin Punalo Alani. (*To BOFFIN.*) He's the father of the one George wants me to fascinate at dinner. He's a terrific old boy and looks like a wizened ivory nut.

GEORGE: Run along, dear, Punalo is here to talk business. Boffin can meet him some other time. Go and fetch him, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, sir.

He goes.

SANDRA: Why on earth does he want to see you at this time of day? Do you suppose there's anything wrong?

GEORGE: As far as Punalo Alani is concerned, everything I do is wrong. He's a class-conscious, prejudiced old Die-Hard, and a damned nuisance into the bargain.

SANDRA: Well, don't let him work you into a bad temper for the whole evening, there's a dear, and don't be too beastly to him either. He's very old indeed and I'm madly in love with him. Come on, Boffin, I'll show you your room. It's quite hideous and full of ants but the view's wonderful. Let's buzz.

BOFFIN: I don't mind if I do.

SANDRA and BOFFIN go off.

GEORGE *helps himself to a whisky and soda and lights a cigarette*. CHRISTOPHER returns, ushering in PUNALO ALANI. PUNALO is a dignified, distinguished old man. His age might be anywhere between sixty-five and eighty-five.

CHRISTOPHER: Mr. Punalo Alani, sir.

GEORGE: Tell Sanyamo I don't want to be disturbed for the next ten minutes.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, sir.

He goes.

GEORGE (*shaking hands*): Good afternoon, Punalo Alani.

PUNALO: Good afternoon, Your Excellency.

GEORGE: Would you like a drink?

PUNALO: No, thank you. I know how busy you are, and I don't want to detain you longer than is necessary.

GEORGE: Sit down at any rate.

PUNALO: It would go against the grain for me to sit while Your Excellency is standing.

GEORGE (*with a smile*): This is an informal interview, Punalo Alani. However, have it your own way. (*He sits.*)

PUNALO (*also sitting*): Thank you. As a matter of fact, Your Excellency has the sublime gift of making all interviews informal. It is most refreshing.

GEORGE: I'm glad you think so.

PUNALO: Although, for us of the older school, it can, at times, be a trifle disconcerting.

GEORGE: I suspect that it would take a great deal to disconcert you, Punalo Alani. You are a very shrewd man.

PUNALO: Your Excellency is most kind. But at the moment I am more than disconcerted; I am profoundly worried.

GEORGE: Why—what's wrong?

PUNALO: A great deal. I come to you as a suppliant. It is not a role that I like for I am a proud man, but there is no alternative.

GEORGE: What on earth is the matter?

PUNALO: I love my country, and I love my people.

GEORGE: Yes. I am aware of that.

PUNALO: And it is a great sadness to me that you, our Governor, should so palpably be in sympathy with the aims and policies of the Samolan Socialist Nationals who, in my opinion, are our enemies.

GEORGE: I really cannot discuss party politics with you, even informally. As Governor, I am entirely impartial. I have no bias in either direction.

PUNALO: Officially that is so, Your Excellency. But your opinions are well known and, in your high position, your opinions, even unofficially, carry considerable weight.

GEORGE: Please come to the point, Punalo Alani.

PUNALO: May I remind you that it was largely owing to your influence last year that the Inter-Island Boat

Service abolished first and second class accommodation in favour of an over-all Tourist class.

GEORGE: And a damned good thing, too. The time for archaic class distinctions has passed.

PUNALO: So has the Inter-Island Boat Service. Into liquidation.

GEORGE: That was the fault of bad organisation and inefficient management.

PUNALO: I beg to disagree, Your Excellency. The reason the company is on the verge of bankruptcy is because the wealthier Samolan and Chinese families have ceased to travel in the steamers and have, on their own initiative, inaugurated a system of private launches.

GEORGE: Industrial profiteers have never been remarkable for their sense of patriotism.

PUNALO: It was not their sense of patriotism that was involved. It was their sense of smell.

GEORGE: What absolute nonsense.

PUNALO: On the contrary. A perfectly logical demonstration of cause and effect.

GEORGE: Cause and effect?

PUNALO: The introduction into the first class cabins and saloons of goats, pigs, chickens and an occasional mongoose wrought considerable havoc in a remarkably short space of time. In addition to which, all luxury fittings, curtains, rugs and smaller articles of furniture entirely disappeared; not only were all the buttons gouged out of the cushions but, by the end of November, there weren't even any cushions. I understand that, with the exception of the occasional mongoose, much the same problem confronts your own nationalised British Railways.

GEORGE: I am willing to admit that the re-grading of

the Inter-Island Boat Service has been badly bungled, but I still maintain that in theory it was, and is, an admirable idea. Fully in keeping with democratic principles.

PUNALO: It is sad, is it not, that the gulf between theory and practice is so often unbridgeable?

GEORGE: In a progressively-minded island with a properly organised educational system, these things would never occur.

PUNALO: However progressive Samolo became, I fear we should still find it difficult to educate our goats and pigs and chickens.

GEORGE: What's all this leading up to, anyway?

PUNALO: It has come to my knowledge that the Samolan Socialist Nationals are planning to introduce a new bill into the House of Representatives.

GEORGE: Well, they have a perfect right to do that if they wish to.

PUNALO: The bill concerns Public Conveniences.

GEORGE: Public Conveniences?

PUNALO: The object of it is to dispense with the penny-in-the-slot system at present in force in the principal public buildings, shops, hotels, cinemas and night-clubs, and make all lavatories on the island entirely free.

GEORGE: It sounds an excellent idea. Why shouldn't they?

PUNALO (*patiently*): Again we are faced with that unbridgeable gulf. It may sound excellent in theory, but in practice it would be disaster.

GEORGE: Why?

PUNALO: In the first place the loss of revenue from the penny-in-the-slot system would create a serious

economic problem. In the second place, the social repercussions from such an arbitrary measure would be appalling.

GEORGE: I can't see for the life of me why they should be.

PUNALO: Your Excellency's point of view may be biased by the fact that you are seldom required to use Public Conveniences yourself.

GEORGE: That is beside the point.

PUNALO: Again I beg to differ. In your position as Governor you automatically enjoy certain privileges and rightly so. Even in the most Utopian Welfare States, privilege is accepted as a natural perquisite of authority. In the Soviet Union itself, that Marxist Paradise of Left-Wing intellectuals, there is no recorded instance of the late Mr. Stalin queuing up for a public lavatory.

GEORGE: I fail to see what the Soviet Union has to do with the present discussion.

PUNALO: The Soviet Union has a great deal to do with the Samolan Socialist Nationals whom Your Excellency tacitly encourages with your support.

GEORGE: You have no proof of that.

PUNALO: Come, come, Your Excellency. It is a well-known fact that Koga Swalu and three of his chief supporters are, or were, acknowledged members of the Communist Party.

GEORGE: I have no wish to discuss the matter any further.

PUNALO: I am sorry if my words have offended you. But Samolo, thank God, is not yet a Welfare State, and it is still permissible to speak freely without fear of reprisals.

GEORGE (*glancing at his watch*): If you have anything more to say, Punalo Alani, please say it. As you yourself admitted at the beginning of this interview, I am a very busy man.

PUNALO: I ask you most humbly, Your Excellency, but most urgently, to veto the Public Convenience bill.

GEORGE (*irritably*): Why the devil should I? To begin with I have not even considered the matter and also, as I have already explained, my official influence does not extend to imposing vetoes on either party.

PUNALO: You have your prerogative of a casting vote in the House of Representatives.

GEORGE: And you seriously expect me to exercise it over a triviality like this?

PUNALO: Public Conveniences are far from being trivialities, Your Excellency. They are, if you will forgive the play upon words, of fundamental importance. Many issues are involved, notably the question of prestige.

GEORGE: Prestige?

PUNALO: Prestige means much to the Samolan people. It provides an incentive to work and encourages progress. An industrious citizen who has, through his own gumption, worked his way up from the cane fields or the banana plantations and become a successful merchant, naturally expects to enjoy the perquisites of his improved social status. One of these is the privilege of being able to spend a penny when he feels like it.

GEORGE: You are wasting my time and your own, Punalo Alani.

PUNALO (*ignoring the interruption*): But it is not only for himself that he covets this minor accolade: it is for

his wife and family. Take old Chim Paouna, for instance, the proprietor of the Pendarla Furnishing Company. Mrs. Paouna, his wife, is one of the most respected and majestic members of the community. Imagine her fighting and struggling with her own employees to force her way into a free lavatory in her own building. The humiliation would kill her.

GEORGE: Mrs. Paouna is quite wealthy enough to instal an entire floor of private toilets if she is so over-sensitive.

PUNALO: Have you envisaged, from the point of view of hygiene alone, the state of the water closets after a week's gratis promiscuous occupation?

GEORGE: No, I most certainly have not.

PUNALO: They will be a grave menace to public health and there won't be a chain or a plug left.

GEORGE: As I said before, you are wasting my time.

PUNALO: I see you are quite adamant.

GEORGE (*rising*): Quite.

PUNALO (*also rising*): Then there is nothing more to be said.

GEORGE: I am sorry, Punalo Alani.

PUNALO: I too am sorry, Your Excellency. You are a stubborn man and, like so many of your countrymen, incurably romantic.

GEORGE: I don't know what you mean.

PUNALO: Your conviction that extreme socialism necessarily implies progress is romantic to the point of fantasy. I know that you have the interests of my country at heart——

GEORGE (*interrupting testily*): In that case, why not accept the fact that over certain matters of policy we do not see eye-to-eye.

PUNALO: As a private individual, I would be willing to accept that unhappy fact, but as a loyal Samolan and a representative of a large number of the Electorate, I cannot.

GEORGE: I understood that you retired from public life some years ago?

PUNALO: That is so. But my son Hali has not retired. He represents the People's Imperial Party. It is on his behalf and on the behalf of the whole country that I came to see you this evening.

GEORGE: Why not let your son speak for himself? He's quite capable of it.

PUNALO: His command of English is not so clear as mine. He, alas, had not the ineffable good fortune to be educated at Eton.

GEORGE: Just as many fools emerge from Eton as from any other school.

PUNALO (*with dignity*): I am not one of them, Your Excellency.

GEORGE (*more gently*): I didn't mean to imply that you were. But as you know, I have not much faith in the mystic properties of the 'Old School Tie'.

PUNALO: The 'Old School Tie' is not, I admit, as important as many consider it to be, but old school ties are very important indeed. I myself have many of them. They bind me both emotionally and intellectually to the England I knew when I was a boy. An England which in many respects was far more peaceful and better ordered than it is today.

GEORGE: England has fought two wars since you were a boy.

PUNALO: I am well aware of that. I served in one of them myself.

GEORGE: Progress is inevitable, Punalo Alani. Why don't you face up to it?

PUNALO: Progress?

GEORGE: Certainly. No one who was not blindly prejudiced could deny that from the point of view of housing, education, employment and general well-being, the ordinary working Englishman today is far better off than he was fifty years ago.

PUNALO: That may be so, but may I point out that the population of England alone is forty times larger than that of the entire Samolan Archipelago. Also England is an industrial country and Samolo is not. We are a backward Race, Your Excellency, so backward, old-fashioned and reactionary that we still like British Rule.

GEORGE: I see that you are romantic, too, Punalo Alani.

PUNALO: Realistic at the same time, Your Excellency. And, with all due respect, I think I have a clearer knowledge of my country's temperament than you have. I know that your friends The Samolan Socialist Nationals wish to emancipate us from the cosy Imperialism that has gently guided us for so long. They wish us to 'Stand Alone', to have 'Self-Government', to endure, unprotected, the fearful discomforts of State-controlled democracy, which are racking Western civilisation. Believe me, we are too young yet for such brave experiments. Too young and gay and irresponsible to be able to do without our old Nanny.

GEORGE: What has all this sentimental nonsense to do with Public Conveniences?

PUNALO (*with sudden sharpness*): A great deal, Your Excellency. As you may discover to your cost.

GEORGE (*icily*): Is that a threat?

PUNALO: Not a threat, Your Excellency. Merely a warning. Good evening.

PUNALO ALANI *bows austere*ly and—

—*walks out*.

GEORGE (*alone*): Well, I'll be damned!

THE LIGHTS FADE

ACT I: SCENE II

The time is a few minutes later.

CHRISTOPHER *is wandering about, filling up cigarette-boxes.*

SANYAMO, *the Samolan butler enters, carrying two trays of 'Appetizers'. He is a handsome man in the late thirties and wears the traditional sarong and a white coat.*

CHRISTOPHER: How's your wife, Sanyamo?

SANYAMO: Which one, Captain?

CHRISTOPHER: The one that had the baby.

SANYAMO: Very well, Captain, but the baby is terrible.

CHRISTOPHER: In what way terrible?

SANYAMO: It makes wicked sounds in the night.

CHRISTOPHER: Does it look like you?

SANYAMO: Oh no, Captain. It looks like Mr. Rochester.

CHRISTOPHER: Who on earth's Mr. Rochester?

SANYAMO: He was here last year with the Oil Company. He was very kind.

CHRISTOPHER: I see.

CUCKOO *and EDWARD HONEY come in. EDWARD is rather dim, earnest and painstaking.*

CUCKOO *is pure Kensington with an Anglo-Indian background.*

CUCKOO: Good evening, Chris. Are we the first?

CHRISTOPHER: Yes. Lady A.'s only just gone to dress.

CUCKOO: There now. What did I tell you, Edward. We needn't have hurried after all.

EDWARD: I want a few words with H. E. before dinner, anyhow. (*To CHRISTOPHER.*) Is he in his room?

CHRISTOPHER: Yes. He's dressing.

EDWARD: I think I'll go along. He won't mind.

CUCKOO: You didn't forget to bring a spare handkerchief, did you?

EDWARD: No, dear.

CUCKOO: And keep well away from the window. You were caught by that bougainvillæa before.

EDWARD: Yes, dear.

CUCKOO: We don't want a repetition of what happened at the Bradley-Coburns, do we?

EDWARD: No dear, we don't.

CUCKOO: And don't keep H. E. too long, you know what you are.

EDWARD: Yes, dear.

He goes.

CHRISTOPHER: Would you like a drink?

CUCKOO: No, thank you. I'll wait a little. What's he like?

CHRISTOPHER: Who?

CUCKOO: John Blair-Kennedy, of course.

CHRISTOPHER: Very nice.

CUCKOO: Everybody seems to be making an awful fuss about him coming here. Personally I don't care for his books much—too talky.

CHRISTOPHER: I'm afraid I've only read the one about the West Indies.

CUCKOO: Oh, that's a sort of travel book. I mean his novels. They're awfully cynical, you know, and none of

his characters seem to believe in anything. They're amusing I suppose, in a flippant way, but I must say I prefer books that have a little more grip, more reality. Do you know what I mean?

CHRISTOPHER: Oh yes—rather.

CUCKOO: Of course I know that there *are* people who go through life having affairs with everybody they see and making jokes and laughing at everything but I can't feel that they really *contribute* very much.

CHRISTOPHER: No. I suppose they don't.

CUCKOO: He's *her* friend more than his, isn't he?

CHRISTOPHER: How do you mean?

CUCKOO: I mean he's known Lady A. longer than he's known H. E.

CHRISTOPHER: I'm afraid I don't know. I didn't ask him.

CUCKOO: I believe he was one of her beaux before she was married.

CHRISTOPHER: I didn't ask him that either.

CUCKOO: Don't be so silly, of course you didn't. Lady A. was very gay in her younger days, you know.

CHRISTOPHER: She occasionally smiles, even now.

CUCKOO: It was a great surprise to everyone when she married H. E. Nobody ever thought she'd ever settle down.

CHRISTOPHER: I wouldn't call being a Governor's wife and organising Women's Federation meetings and making public speeches, settling down exactly.

CUCKOO: You know perfectly well what I mean. After all, everybody knows she belonged to rather a wild set in London. One of her greatest friends was Lady Caroline Trouncer.

CHRISTOPHER: What did *she* do?

CUCKOO: My dear, she was notorious! She married three husbands one after the other.

CHRISTOPHER: She couldn't very well have married them all at the same time.

CUCKOO: Then she ran off to East Africa with a jockey, leaving behind her two sweet little girls, and then she went to Vienna and had her face lifted.

CHRISTOPHER (*laughing*): Really, Cuckoo!

CUCKOO: It's true. There was a tremendous craze for it at one time. There was even a rumour that Lady A. had had hers done.

CHRISTOPHER (*angrily*): Damned nonsense!

CUCKOO: Naturally I don't believe it, but that was the rumour. Quite definitely.

CHRISTOPHER: If you don't believe it and it's only a rumour, why spread it?

CUCKOO: Why Chris—you're getting quite hot under the collar. You're not falling in love with her, are you?

CHRISTOPHER: Of course I'm not.

CUCKOO: There's no 'of course' about it. It would be quite natural for a young man of your age to conceive a romantic passion for Lady A. She's still a very attractive woman and I'm sure she wouldn't mind in the least.

CHRISTOPHER: Lady A. has been very kind to me and I like her very much. I like H. E. too. He's a wonderful man.

CUCKOO: My dear, you needn't be so aggressively loyal. I'm absolutely devoted to them both myself.

CHRISTOPHER: You don't speak as if you were.

CUCKOO (*putting her hand on his arm*): Why we're almost squabbling, aren't we? How too ridiculous. Don't be cross.

CHRISTOPHER: I'm not in the least cross.

CUCKOO: You know I can't help saying what I think. It's part of my nature.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, I know.

CUCKOO (*after a slight pause*): Are we friends again?

CHRISTOPHER: Of course.

CUCKOO: I wanted to talk to you seriously, and confidentially.

CHRISTOPHER: What about?

CUCKOO: You won't fly off the handle again, will you?

CHRISTOPHER: If it's about Lady A. and H. E., I might.

CUCKOO: Well, it is—and you mustn't. It's too important—and I'm worried.

CHRISTOPHER: Why?

CUCKOO: They have too many mixed parties here at Government House. I've never been to one without at least a few coloured people present, and generally there are dozens. Believe me, the British are beginning to resent it.

CHRISTOPHER: There have to be mixed parties at Government House. It's part of the job. And a very important part too.

CUCKOO: Of course it is. I know that. But there is such a thing as going too far. I tell you people are beginning to criticise, and I don't like it. Neither does my husband.

CHRISTOPHER: Why doesn't he say something to H. E. then? After all, he is the Colonial Secretary.

CUCKOO: It wouldn't be any use. You know Edward isn't a very forceful character and H. E. can be as stubborn as a mule when he likes. Anyhow, it's

Lady A. they're talking about most. She's hob-nobbing too much.

CHRISTOPHER: Rubbish.

CUCKOO: Look what happened at the races last Tuesday. She spent nearly the whole afternoon with those awful Amabooas.

CHRISTOPHER: Choom Amabooa is the great grandson of one of the native princes here in the old days before the revolution. He's a nice boy.

CUCKOO: What about his wife? Why, she's half Chinkl

CHRISTOPHER: What difference does that make?

CUCKOO: Of course, if you're determined not to understand——

CHRISTOPHER (*irritably*): Look out—somebody's coming.

ADMIRAL and MRS. TURLING *come in*. *He is square and stocky with bristling eyebrows. She is faded, gentle and rather vague.*

MRS. T.: We're not late, I hope? The car went wrong and we had to keep stopping.

CHRISTOPHER: Not a bit. Lady A. and H. E. are still dressing.

ADMIRAL: There's a rattle somewhere and I can't locate it.

MRS. T.: How are you, Cuckoo? (*She kisses CUCKOO absently.*) What a pretty dress.

CUCKOO: You must have seen it before.

MRS. T.: Of course I have, dear, several times. But I'm very fond of it. How are the children?

CUCKOO: Cynthia's all right, but I left poor Susan in floods.

MRS. T.: What's the matter?

CUCKOO: They won't let her play Prince Charming

in the pantomime because that horrid Rogers girl insists on doing it.

MRS. T.: What a shame. What's Susan going to be, then?

CUCKOO: The Fairy Godmother, and a wolf in the forest scene. The last time she was an animal she came out in a terrible rash all over.

MRS. T.: It's having to crawl about in a hot skin in this climate.

CHRISTOPHER: Martini, Mrs. Turling?

MRS. T. (*accepting it*): Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER: Admiral—pink gin as usual?

ADMIRAL: Thanks, Chris—best drink in the world—can't bear mixtures—never could. Did this writer chap, Blair-Kennedy, arrive safely?

CHRISTOPHER (*handing him his pink gin*): Yes. He got in about two hours ago.

ADMIRAL: His aunt was Lady Gravesborough, you know. I met her once in Malta years ago. She danced a Scottish Reel like a two-year-old.

MRS. T.: Malta was such fun in those days.

ADMIRAL: It was in old Crutchworth's time. He used to be called 'Crossbones'.

CUCKOO: Why?

ADMIRAL: Rammed a Chinese junk in Hong Kong harbour—sank it like a stone—terrible hullabaloo.

CHRISTOPHER: Ready for a drink yet, Cuckoo?

CUCKOO: Yes—a dry Martini, please.

CHRISTOPHER (*handing her one*): Here you are.

BOFFIN *comes in. He is wearing a white dinner jacket.*

BOFFIN (*to CHRISTOPHER*): There was a strange insect in my bathroom, brown and rather beastly, like a small lobster.

CHRISTOPHER: Sounds like a scorpion.

BOFFIN: That's what I feared.

CHRISTOPHER: We often get them in the dry season.

BOFFIN: We must pray for rain.

CHRISTOPHER (*introducing*): Admiral Turling—Mrs. Turling—Mrs. Honey—Mr. Blair-Kennedy.

BOFFIN: How do you do?

ADMIRAL (*shaking hands*): Have a good flight?

BOFFIN: From the aeronautical point of view, yes. Socially, it left a good deal to be desired.

MRS. T.: The last time we flew home there was a whole family of the most enchanting Chinese children in the plane.

BOFFIN: They must have season tickets.

ADMIRAL: I once met your aunt, Lady Gravesborough, in Malta.

BOFFIN: Was she sober?

ADMIRAL (*slightly nonplussed*): Yes—I think so.

BOFFIN: Then it must have been a very long time ago. She took to the bottle in her later years, you know, and kept on marrying very young Italian counts with sweeping eyelashes and too many bracelets.

MRS. T.: Just fancy.

BOFFIN: They all turned up in Bugattis for the reading of the will. It was most impressive.

MRS. T.: It must have been.

SIR GEORGE *comes in, wearing an immaculate white suit*. EDWARD HONEY *follows him with his handkerchief to his nose*.

GEORGE: Sorry I'm late, everybody. Your husband started sneezing again, Cuckoo. We had to take the flowers out of the room and close all the windows. Boffin—this is the Colonial Secretary—he looks a bit

under the weather at the moment but it will pass off. Give him a drink, Chris.

EDWARD (*shaking hands, miserably*): How do you do—must apologise for this.

BOFFIN: Not at all—I sympathise. It always happens to me at race meetings. I'm allergic to horses.

CUCKOO: How extraordinary it is—about being allergic I mean—it's quite a new thing, isn't it?

BOFFIN: Doctors find it very useful. It simplifies diagnosis.

ROBERT FROME *comes in. He is a large, sunburnt man in the late thirties. He is Chief of Police for the Pendarla district.*

GEORGE: Good evening, Bob.

BOB: I'm afraid I'm a bit late, sir. But another car robbery case came up just as I was leaving. Grigsby's away in the hills and I had to deal with it.

GEORGE (*introducing*): Captain Frome, our Chief of Police—Mr. Blair-Kennedy. You know everyone else.

BOB: Rather. (*Shaking hands with BOFFIN.*) Hope you had a good journey?

CUCKOO: It's becoming quite an epidemic, all these car robberies. Do you think it's a gang?

BOB (*accepting a Martini from CHRISTOPHER*): No—not as serious as that really. This time it was the Lashmores' new Buick.

ADMIRAL: Surely that can be traced fairly easily. There are very few American cars on the island.

BOB: We shall probably get it back in a day or two, providing we can locate it before they break it up.

MRS. T.: Break it up?

BOB: Yes—it's a new racket. They take them up to the hills, dismember them completely and then smuggle

the bits over to one of the other islands and sell them.

BOFFIN: What on earth do the people that buy them do with them?

BOB: All manner of things. Make them into ornaments and pots and pans. The natives are extremely clever with their hands, you know.

BOFFIN: Yes. Lady Alexandra explained that to me only a little while ago, didn't she, George?

BOB: Radiator caps fetch a big price.

BOFFIN: Why?

BOB: The women wear them.

BOFFIN: Don't tell me where—let me guess.

BOB (*to* GEORGE): Hali is dining here tonight, isn't he, sir?

GEORGE: Yes.

BOB: I'll have a little talk to him. His organisation has ways and means of finding out things that we poor policemen can't compete with.

CUCKOO: I wouldn't trust Hali farther than I could see him.

EDWARD (*warningly*): Now then, dear——

CUCKOO: He's too smooth and I don't believe he means a word he says. I can't bear people who don't mean what they say. Can you, Mr. Kennedy?

BOFFIN: I don't mind them. It's the people who only say what they mean who frighten the life out of me.

CUCKOO (*with a little laugh*): How cynical! That's just like a line out of one of your books.

BOFFIN (*agreeably*): Yes, isn't it? No wonder they're so successful.

LADY ALEXANDRA *comes in*. *She is, as usual, a trifle breathless.*

SANDRA: I'm so sorry, everybody. I do wish I could just once be on time for something, but everything went wrong—George, ought the bath water to be such a very dark brown? It looks like Mulligatawny.

ADMIRAL: It's the drought.

SANDRA: Good evening, Cuckoo. How nice and cool you look. I love that dress. Edward, dear—how's the sinus?

GEORGE: Hay fever, my love.

EDWARD: Not very good, I'm afraid.

SANDRA: It is beastly for you, I *am* so sorry. Perhaps a Benzedrine inhaler would be a help, I believe I've got one somewhere. Admiral, how nice to see you—(to MRS. TURLING)—Grace, I must talk to you later. You are on the Unmarried Mothers sub-committee and so it's more your dish than mine.

MRS. T.: What has happened?

SANDRA: It's the cashier in Woo Chung's Emporium. She's been at it again.

MRS. T.: Oh dear—how unfortunate.

SANDRA (to BOFFIN): Illegitimacy is one of our major problems here. This girl is an absolute fiend. She never stops having children all over the place and nothing will induce her to get married. We even had her baptized at Easter but it was no good.

BOFFIN: Funny—I always thought that was a sure cure.

SANDRA: The trouble is I can't help rather liking her. She's quite lovely in a louche sort of way and she has a beguiling sense of humour and the most tremendous vitality.

BOFFIN: I should think she'd need both.

SANDRA: Then of course, there's the cross-breed

question. If only the Samolans would be content to hop into bed with each other it would all be so much simpler. But they will fraternise.

MRS. T.: They're a friendly people, you know, and immensely hospitable.

SANDRA: Nothing has ever been able to convince them that sex is wrong. To them it's just as simple as eating mangoes.

BOFFIN: Only less stringy and indigestible.

CUCKOO: There's an appalling amount of mixed blood on this island, Mr. Kennedy, and it's increasing alarmingly. Before we know where we are we shall find ourselves in the same position as South Africa.

BOFFIN: Or Brighton.

GEORGE: I think we've had enough of this sort of conversation now. Hali will be arriving in a minute and we don't want him to catch us all chattering away about miscegenation. He mightn't quite like it.

SANDRA: It's all my fault—I started it. But I did want Boffin to get some idea of what goes on.

BOFFIN: I'm doing fine.

SANDRA: Bob! I never said good evening to you. What's happened about the sex murder?

GEORGE: Here we go again.

BOB: Nothing so far, I'm afraid.

SANDRA: Any clues?

BOB: Only a screwdriver and a rather tattered copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

SANYAMO *comes in*.

SANYAMO (*announcing*): Mr. Hali Alani.

SANYAMO *steps aside to allow HALI ALANI to enter, and then disappears*. HALI is tall, distinguished and impeccably dressed. He is wearing a white European dinner jacket over a

brilliantly coloured Samolan sarong. On his feet are gold sandals.

HALI: I fear very much that I am the latest to arrive.

SANDRA: Don't give it another thought. You've only beaten me by a short head, anyhow.

HALI *bows and shakes hands with GEORGE and then kisses SANDRA's hand.*

GEORGE: Good evening, Hali. I missed you at the races on Tuesday. What happened to you?

HALI: I had to attend a family funeral.

SANDRA: Oh, how sad for you. I'm so sorry.

HALI: Please do not be sorry. It was splendid fun. There was a dance afterwards.

GEORGE: Not a very close relative I gather?

HALI: Oh no. Only a cousin once and for all removed. He was very old and very disagreeable, and it was what you would call high time.

SANDRA: I see. I want to introduce you to Mr. Blair-Kennedy. He has just arrived.

HALI (*bowing to BOFFIN*): The island welcomes you.

BOFFIN: Thank you.

HALI: Your books are an unfailing delight to me. I have them all and every one and I read them without ceasing. You are a most admirable and cheerful fellow.

BOFFIN: Thank you again.

HALI: It would ease my heart of much of its grateful burden if you would permit me to show you some of our island customs. There may be a great deal to enchant and astound you and provide you with copies. I will therefore, with His Excellency's permission, give you a buzz in the morning.

BOFFIN: That will be delightful.

SANDRA: Admiral and Mrs. Turling you know—The Colonial Secretary—Mrs. Honey——

CUCKOO: Good evening, Mr. Alani.

HALI: I am so sad about your daughter being again a wolf this year, Mrs. Honey.

CUCKOO: How on earth did you know? It was only decided this afternoon.

BOB: Hali knows everything.

HALI: It is nothing mysterious! This afternoon I rushed into Mr. Robbins the bank manager by chance. His little daughter with the funny teeth is also to be a wolf.

BOFFIN: It sounds most suitable, but I'm afraid I have rather lost the thread of the conversation.

SANDRA: It's the pantomime, Boffin dear. They do one every year. It confuses the natives dreadfully.

CUCKOO: How can you, Sandra! It was a tremendous success last time.

SANDRA: Not with the students, Cuckoo. They thought it was propaganda and resented it. (To BOFFIN.) Mrs. Togstone, who is an ardent supporter of the Samolan Socialist Nationals, played Dick Whittington. It nearly caused a riot.

Mrs. T.: Poor Mrs. Togstone—that native hut—and all those brooches.

GEORGE: This year they're doing *Cinderella*, less controversial. All class distinctions nicely adjusted. None of that inflammatory stuff about men of the people becoming Lord Mayors. Just honest, straightforward snob value.

SANDRA: I don't think they really believed for a moment that Mrs. Togstone was a man-of-the-people. They just got thoroughly muddled by the whole thing and rather irritable.

GEORGE: What will you drink, Hali?

HALI: Some plain soda-water, if you please.

SANDRA: Oh dear—how unconvivial of you.

HALI: If I drink strong liquor before food, I am liable to become immeasurably gay and make loud noises.

BOFFIN: I should have thought that plain soda-water would induce even louder ones.

SANDRA: There's a kala-kala cocktail all ready for you. It's a Government House speciality. We call it 'Westward Ho'.

GEORGE: Come on, Hali—let yourself go and relax—no politics tonight. You don't have to be careful what you say.

CUCKOO: I am sure that Mr. Alani is always careful what he says.

HALI: How kind of you, Mrs. Honey. It is true that I try to be, but my English sometimes betrays me into foolishness. I have not, alas, my father's supreme mastery of the language, but then, he went to Eton.

GEORGE: That's more than I did.

SANDRA (*warningly*): Now then, George—no inverted snobbism—

HALI: My father learnt many other things at Eton besides language.

BOFFIN: Could be.

HALI: And he wore a black shiny hat. We have it still in our library.

SANDRA: Mr. Alani, please weaken and have one little drink. I shall feel utterly miserable if you don't.

HALI: How can I not weaken at such sweet and tempting words.

SANDRA: Chris. Give Mr. Alani a 'Westward Ho'

immediately, and give me one too, and then we can all make terrific noises and have a wonderful time.

HALI (*with a smile*): I am overruled.

SANDRA: British Colonial Administration in a nutshell.

CHRISTOPHER *hands SANDRA and HALI two cocktails.*

SANDRA (*raising her glass*): To your self-control, Mr. Alani.

GEORGE (*raising his glass*): To your ultimate self-government, Hali.

SANDRA: George, dear, there are moments when your subtlety quite overwhelms me.

HALI (*raising his glass*): To you, Lady Alexandra. I drink this one little toast to you because of your great kindness and understanding of my people; because for our island it is sweet that you are here; because you make so light the good work you do; because you always laugh at serious things and make the little swift jokes to ease away the difficulty of living, and above all, Lady Alexandra, to use the vulgar slang that flies too easily to my tongue, because you do not miss a bloody trick! (*He drinks his cocktail in one gulp.*)

SANYAMO (*entering*): Dinner is served, Your Excellencies.

SANDRA: Thank you, dear Hali Alani. That was a most charming toast and it has touched me very much. Come along, everybody—Boffin—Cuckoo—Admiral—Grace—— (*She ushers the women off in the direction of the dining-room. Just as she is going, she turns to GEORGE and says softly.*) How am I doing, darling?

CURTAIN.

ACT II: SCENE I

The scene is the same and the time is about three hours later.

When the curtain rises, BOFFIN is lying in a long chair with a whisky and soda beside him on a small table. CUCKOO HONEY is seated near him. She is working on an embroidery frame.

CUCKOO: —and of course they're dreadful about animals—no imagination whatever. The way they belabour those poor unfortunate mules would make your blood boil. I've always been funny like that, you know—I just can't bear to see animals ill-treated.

BOFFIN: Perhaps you should consult a psychiatrist.

CUCKOO: No, but seriously—they're not nearly as civilised as they think they are. Of course, some of them, the more educated types like Hali Alani, have a sort of veneer, but it's only skin deep, I assure you. Just you try scratching that veneer and see what happens.

BOFFIN: I doubt if a suitable opportunity will occur.

CUCKOO: I sometimes wonder if dear Sandra really understands that.

BOFFIN: What?

CUCKOO: How primitive they still are—underneath.

BOFFIN: I think we're all fairly primitive underneath. I know that I am constantly having to crush down the most appalling urges.

CUCKOO: I expect you see life quite differently from ordinary people—I mean, being a world-famous writer and having people making a fuss of you all the time.

BOFFIN: They occasionally let up.

CUCKOO: I'm afraid you must have found this evening very dull.

BOFFIN: Not at all. I've enjoyed it immensely.

CUCKOO: You know, I have a dreadful confession to make.

BOFFIN: Confession?

CUCKOO: You'll probably think me absolutely awful, but I can't bear false pretences and playing up to people—it's just not in my nature.

BOFFIN: Very commendable.

CUCKOO: And anyhow, you're so brilliant and successful that what I say couldn't matter to you one way or the other, could it?

BOFFIN: That depends what it is.

CUCKOO: Well it's this—I've read all your books and frankly, I didn't care for them.

BOFFIN: Did you buy them or get them from the library?

CUCKOO: I bought them of course. We have all our books sent out from Hatchards.

BOFFIN: Well, that's all right then, isn't it?

CUCKOO: Honestly, I don't think they're worthy of you.

BOFFIN: How do you know?

CUCKOO: Do you—really and truly—like them yourself?

BOFFIN: Tremendously. I just can't put them down.

CUCKOO: Of course, I know they're frightfully clever and all that, but you must admit they don't 'contribute' very much, do they?

BOFFIN: They contribute a hell of a lot to me.

CUCKOO: I wasn't speaking commercially.

BOFFIN: I was.

CUCKOO: With the world in its present state there are so many really important things to write about.

BOFFIN: Name three.

CUCKOO: I know I'm not very good at expressing myself and I expect you think I'm an awful fool——

BOFFIN: The idea had occurred to me.

CUCKOO (*with a flustered little laugh*): I asked for that——didn't I?

BOFFIN: Yes.

CUCKOO: But a man with your gifts and your experience of the world and people, don't you think you have a sort of responsibility, a sort of duty, to the public?

BOFFIN: In what way?

CUCKOO: You could do so much to help.

BOFFIN: Who?

CUCKOO: All sorts of people.

BOFFIN: How?

CUCKOO: I see it's no use saying any more. You're just deliberately misunderstanding me.

BOFFIN: I wouldn't be sure of that.

CUCKOO (*with dignity*): You must forgive me if I have been impertinent.

BOFFIN: Why?

CUCKOO: I'm sure I'm very sorry if I spoke out of turn. I should have thought a man in your position would be big enough to be able to take a little honest criticism.

BOFFIN: Why?

CUCKOO (*angrily, shoving her embroidery into her bag*): But I see I was wrong.

BOFFIN: Then you're making giant strides, Mrs. Honey.

CHRISTOPHER *comes in.*

CHRISTOPHER: I've just packed the Turlings into their car. Their battery's dead and they have no lights, so Bob Frome is leading them home. Where's Lady A.?

CUCKOO: She's still in the garden with Hali Alani. They went out a long time ago.

CHRISTOPHER: Edward has finished with H. E. He's gone to his own office to sign some letters. He asked me to tell you to pick him up there when you go.

CUCKOO: It's getting very late.

CHRISTOPHER: I can drop you home if you like. I've got to go to Mitzi's party at the Opula Club.

CUCKOO: No. I'd better wait for Edward. Oughtn't you to wait until Hali Alani goes?

CHRISTOPHER: No. H. E. said it would be all right. Mr. Kennedy, would you explain to Lady A. that I've gone on to Mitzi's?

BOFFIN: Certainly. Who is Mitzi?

CHRISTOPHER: Mitzi Radlett. She's quite a character. I'll get Lady A. to ask her up to dinner one night and we'll make her do her imitations. She takes off everyone in the Colony.

CUCKOO: Personally I can't stand her. Of course in our position here we have to be outwardly nice to everyone. I mean to say, it's part of the job, isn't it?

BOFFIN: Presumably.

CUCKOO: I said to my husband only the other day, 'Have her to the house if you must—officially. But no more than that.'

BOFFIN: Was he planning a more intimate association?

CUCKOO: No, Mr. Kennedy. He was not.

CHRISTOPHER: Poor old Mitzi. You have got it in for her, haven't you?

CUCKOO: Certainly not. I just don't happen to like the way she goes on. Of course, I know she has money and entertains a lot, and Heaven knows I'm not a snob, but one either knows how to behave or one doesn't. (*To BOFFIN.*) Don't you agree?

BOFFIN: With every fibre of my being.

CHRISTOPHER: She's very popular on the island.

CUCKOO: Only with a certain set. Actually, she is a very bad influence. Pam Hewlenn said that the last party she gave was an absolute brawl, all colours and classes mixed up.

CHRISTOPHER: I think Mitzi's parties are great fun. Good-night, Cuckoo. Good-night, sir.

BOFFIN: Good-night. I hope you have a good time.

CHRISTOPHER: Thanks.

He goes.

CUCKOO: Poor Chris.

BOFFIN: Why poor? He seems remarkably cheerful to me.

CUCKOO: We're all rather worried about him. He gads about far too much.

BOFFIN: Why shouldn't he when he's not on duty?

CUCKOO: In a small island like this, any of us who have the slightest connection with the Government are always on duty.

BOFFIN: I think you shoulder the White Man's Burden quite splendidly, Mrs. Honey. You must be exhausted.

CUCKOO: I know you're laughing at me and I suppose it's my own fault.

BOFFIN: You have the most disconcerting habit of

making statements to which there is absolutely no reply.

CUCKOO: I just can't help feeling strongly about certain things. I was brought up in India you see, and I expect a sense of the importance of British prestige is more or less ingrained in me.

BOFFIN: Time marches on.

CUCKOO: My father was stationed at Darjeeling when I was born.

BOFFIN: Nice place, Darjeeling.

CUCKOO: Do you know it?

BOFFIN: No. But a friend of mine shot himself through the foot there once. He spoke very highly of it.

CUCKOO: I always think that India gives one an entirely different viewpoint, particularly with regard to our relationships with native populations.

BOFFIN: It's certainly done its best.

CUCKOO: I know that the modern democratic idea is that we should treat them all as equals, but I must say——

BOFFIN: Allow me to correct you. The really modern idea is that we should treat them all as superiors.

CUCKOO (*with a gay laugh*): I see we agree at last.

BOFFIN: It's been a grisly struggle.

CUCKOO: You mustn't think from the way I go on that I don't like the Samolans. As a matter of fact I'm very fond of them. They're like children in some ways but what I really feel is that they are becoming rather spoiled children. That's why I'm worried about Sandra.

BOFFIN: Oh—are you worried about *her* too?

CUCKOO: Not worried exactly—but a little bit perturbed.

BOFFIN: Why?

CUCKOO: Well, I don't think she quite realises a lot of things, all the ins and outs of the situation.

BOFFIN: She'll probably win through in the end. Give her time.

CUCKOO: You've known her for years, haven't you?

BOFFIN: Yes. We're old friends.

CUCKOO: She must have been lovely as a girl.

BOFFIN: No. As a matter of fact she was quite hideous.

CUCKOO: Oh!

BOFFIN: Fat and ungainly, you know—always knocking things over.

CUCKOO: You can't expect me to believe that.

BOFFIN: You can believe anything if you have enough faith. Wishful thinking works wonders.

CUCKOO: You could help her.

BOFFIN: In what way?

CUCKOO: By talking to her.

BOFFIN: About the ins and outs of the native population?

CUCKOO: Well, more or less—I mean——

BOFFIN: That's exactly what I would be fascinated to find out. What *do* you mean?

CUCKOO: Everybody adores Sandra. She's so enthusiastic and so vital and she works terribly hard but she *is* inclined to be a trifle indiscreet.

BOFFIN: Indiscreet?

CUCKOO: You must have seen for yourself at dinner tonight how she was laughing and joking with Hali Alani to the exclusion of everyone else and now she's been out in the garden alone with him for hours. I know there isn't anything in it *really* and that it's just

thoughtlessness, but you know how people gossip in a small place like this.

BOFFIN: That is becoming increasingly clear to me.

CUCKOO (*stiffly*): I'm afraid I rather resent your tone, Mr. Kennedy.

BOFFIN: Well, that's quite fair. I've been resenting yours for the last ten minutes. (*He rises and goes to the drink table.*) Would you like a drink?

CUCKOO: No, thank you.

BOFFIN: I think I'll have one if you don't mind.

CUCKOO: I wouldn't like you to misunderstand my motives in speaking as I have.

BOFFIN (*mixing a drink*): Don't worry. I understand your motives perfectly.

CUCKOO: I thought I could talk to you confidentially, as a friend.

BOFFIN: Surely that was rather an erratic assumption, considering that we only met this evening for the first time?

CUCKOO: I'm aware that I am entirely to blame for the fact that we're not hitting it off. I should never have made the foolish mistake of criticising your books.

BOFFIN: Your real mistake lay in imagining that I should be interested.

CUCKOO: That was downright rude, Mr. Kennedy.

BOFFIN: Yes, it was, Mrs. Honey, and unlike your own rather inept achievements in the same field, it was fully intended to be.

CUCKOO (*bridling*): Well, really! Good-night, Mr. Kennedy.

BOFFIN (*raising his glass*): The skin off your nose, Mrs. Honey.

CUCKOO *swears out.*

BOFFIN *looks after her with a slight smile and sips his drink.* SANDRA and HALI ALANI *come in from the garden. HALI is wearing a tuberoses in his buttonhole.*

SANDRA: Boffin, darling. Your first evening in Samolo and here you are sozzling all by yourself in the moonlight. Where's everybody gone?

BOFFIN: I can tell you categorically, but I warn you it will be dull.

SANDRA: Where's Chris?

BOFFIN: With dear old Mitzi. She's giving some killing imitations at the what's-a-name club.

SANDRA: You must meet Mitzi. She's one of those people one loves out here but rather dreads having to lunch in London.

BOFFIN: Heaven knows I'm not a snob but one must draw the line somewhere.

SANDRA: I see you've been talking to Cuckoo.

BOFFIN: Cuckoo has been talking to me. There's a subtle distinction.

SANDRA: There's something about Cuckoo that I like but I can never think what it is. Has she gone home?

BOFFIN: She flounced off in a rage to collect her allergic husband.

SANDRA: Were you beastly to her?

BOFFIN: Fairly. But she certainly asked for it.

SANDRA: Oh dear! There's been a drama—I can feel it in the air. Hali, do help yourself to a drink and sit down. You look so impermanent standing about like that.

HALI: It is getting late, Lady Sandra. It is time for me to tootle off home.

SANDRA: Don't tootle quite yet, just relax for a minute after pounding up and down all those garden

paths. (To BOFFIN.) He's been teaching me the Samolan names for everything—absolutely fascinating. The night-scented jasmin's out on account of the moon. I've forgotten the name for that already.

HALI: Solali Lalua Lugi.

BOFFIN: That ought to fix Beverley Nichols.

SANDRA: Give me some orange juice, Boffin. There's some in that jug. Hali—would you like whisky, brandy, kala-kala or what?

HALI: I, too, will take orange juice.

SANDRA: Oh dear, it's awfully difficult to influence people who only drink orange juice. Won't you at least have a nip of gin in it?

HALI: If you will, Lady Sandra.

SANDRA: Of course I will.

HALI: Is it me that you wish to influence?

SANDRA: Oh, yes. Didn't you know? I've been tearing myself to shreds in the garden for hours.

HALI: On what part of me is it that you wish the influence to work? My character or my political views?

SANDRA: I think you have a charming character, Hali. I wouldn't try to tamper with it for the world.

HALI: Was it for the politics then, that you gave me the tuberose?

SANDRA (*smiling*): I gave you the tuberose because it smells very nice and looks very nice. You really should have a hibiscus behind your ear. I can't imagine why I didn't think of it.

BOFFIN: You must be slipping.

HALI: A red flower behind the ear in this country makes a great significance.

BOFFIN: It would be fairly significant in Uxbridge.

HALI: Where is that?

BOFFIN: A dear little village near Arthur Rank.

SANDRA: Boffin—be a dear and give us our drinks and go right away somewhere.

BOFFIN: I've only just unpacked.

SANDRA: You know perfectly well what I mean. Haven't you got a nice book to read?

BOFFIN: Yes. It's called *Tomorrow is the End*. But I don't feel in the mood for it tonight. (*He hands them their drinks.*)

SANDRA: Go and play the piano, then. Just let your fingers roam lightly over the keys—not too lightly though, because the climate makes them stick. Improvise—something romantic and nostalgic. (*To HALI.*) He improvises beautifully.

BOFFIN (*going into the house*): Don't we all?

He goes.

SANDRA: Isn't Boffin charming? He's one of my dearest friends.

HALI: In that he is most splendidly fortunate.

SANDRA: Have you really read his books or were you merely being polite?

HALI: I have read every one. They have made me laugh like drains.

SANDRA: Just one drain, Hali. Not a whole lot.

HALI: I find the English idiom difficult to grip.

SANDRA (*settling herself in the chaise longue*): Now then—where were we?

HALI (*sitting on the verandah rail*): When?

SANDRA: When I said it was time to come in.

HALI: We were speaking about the Samolan children and how like fishes they swam. You also mentioned His Excellency your husband and the hump of Richard the Third.

SANDRA: You probably thought I was dotty. But I must have been leading up to something.

HALI: You were looking most pretty while you spoke.

SANDRA: Was I really? How gratifying.

HALI: I am very susceptible to the beauty of ladies.

SANDRA: Very right and proper. Your parents must be so relieved.

HALI: In any country, Lady Sandra, you would be most lovely. But here in Samolo it is even more clear.

SANDRA: How do you account for that geographical distinction?

HALI: The light on this island is different—particularly when the stars are out. When we were standing by the big jacaranda tree and looking up at the sky—your eyes were shining.

SANDRA (*scrutinising her face in her compact*): Well, my nose is shining now like a lighthouse. (*She powders it vigorously.*)

HALI: You make the mock of my words?

SANDRA: Well, no—not exactly—but I never quite know what to do when people pay me compliments. It rather embarrasses me.

HALI: Most ladies like the compliments no end.

SANDRA: Yes, I'm sure they do, but——

HALI: I do not quite understand. When we walk in the garden you are most sweet and soft, but here on the verandah you are suddenly sharp as nails. I find myself at sea.

SANDRA (*helplessly*): Oh, dear!

HALI: Have I, without knowing, said something beastly rude to offend you?

SANDRA: No, Hali. Of course you haven't.

HALI: Then why is the mood of growing friendship suddenly in the smithereens?

SANDRA: The mood of growing friendship is quite all right—really it is—only I would just like it to stay like that and not become complicated in any way.

At this moment, BOFFIN, indoors, begins to play sentimental music on the piano. There is a slight pause.

HALI: Did His Excellency ask you to talk to me in the garden?

SANDRA (*with a smile*): The tuberose was my own idea entirely.

HALI: Did he, Lady Sandra?

SANDRA (*listening to the music*): There now—that sounds lovely, doesn't it? He has such a light touch. A light touch, Hali, is one of the most important things in the world. You will remember that, won't you?

HALI: I will try. (*He turns away.*)

SANDRA: Are you angry with me?

HALI: Yes.

SANDRA: Oh—please don't be. There isn't anything to be angry about—really there isn't.

HALI: I am a man of great pride in my heart and I do not like to be thought the bloody fool.

SANDRA: No one would ever think you that, Hali.

HALI: I wish to be a friend both to you as a lady, and to your country which I love much although I have never been there. I wish to be trusted.

SANDRA: There was no question of not trusting you.

HALI: His Excellency does not trust me, or my father.

SANDRA: Of course he does. Why shouldn't he?

HALI: Because he thinks we are behind times and make the bad influence on people.

SANDRA: I don't think he considers you a bad influence exactly. He just feels that your ideas for the future of the country are a little—a little retrogressive.

HALI: What is that?

SANDRA: Well—the opposite of progressive. Going backwards instead of forwards.

HALI: I thought that 'progressive' meant going to the left.

SANDRA: Well, in a political sense I suppose it does really; at any rate that is what a lot of people seem to think.

HALI: His Excellency, also?

SANDRA (*firmly*): Yes, Hali. My husband is a socialist and an idealist. He believes that all men should be equal and independent and free to do what they want to do. That is why he wishes to help the Samolans to break away from British Colonial authority and learn to govern themselves.

HALI: But they do not want to. They are most contented as they are.

SANDRA: Yes, I know, but you must see that it would be better for them in the long run.

HALI: Why?

SANDRA (*floundering a little*): Well—because they would ultimately have Dominion status and be their own masters like Canada and Australia and South Africa.

HALI (*horrified*): South Africa?

SANDRA: Oh dear, perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned South Africa. I'm not very good at this sort of discussion. Do let's talk about something else.

HALI (*smiling*): You are a very sweet lady.

SANDRA: That's better. Now we know where we are.

HALI: And that is a beautiful, beautiful dress.

SANDRA: Thank you, Hali. I'm so glad you like it. It came from Paris.

HALI: Does Paris have self-government?

SANDRA: Yes, every Tuesday.

HALI: I have never in my life made the travels. I have never seen any of the world's glorious wonders, Mount Vesuvius, the Arc de Triomphe, the Albert Hall.

SANDRA: Well, when you do, take my advice and make a bee line for the Arc de Triomphe.

HALI: There are so many questions I would wish to pose to you.

SANDRA (*smiling*): Pose away.

HALI: For instance, is it true that in England all the Public Conveniences are free?

SANDRA (*startled*): Public Conveniences? Do you mean buses and taxis and tubes?

HALI: Oh no. I mean Public Conveniences.

SANDRA: What an extraordinary question. Why on earth do you want to know?

HALI: Both my father and I think most deeply about Public Conveniences.

SANDRA: Then you should really try to snap out of it.

HALI: What is snap?

SANDRA: Never mind. It doesn't matter.

HALI: You have not given the answer to my question.

SANDRA: It rather took me by surprise.

HALI: Are they then free for rich and poor alike?

SANDRA: Well, if you must know, some of them are and some of them aren't. In most of them you pop a penny in the slot and hope for the best.

HALI (*clapping his hands*): Hurrah! Bravo! Good egg!

SANDRA: This is one of the most baffling conversations I have ever had.

HALI: Was it about the Public Conveniences that His Excellency wished that you would influence me?

SANDRA: No. Strange as it may seem to you, the subject never came up.

HALI: I am most glad.

SANDRA: I think I am too, really. It's not a particularly edifying topic.

HALI: Was it perhaps that he wished you to persuade me to turn to the left?

SANDRA: No, Hali, it was not. Please don't let's talk about it any more. It was just foolishness.

HALI: You will perhaps let me say one more tiny thing?

SANDRA: If you insist.

HALI: It is this. In the political affairs in which I have power, I believe that I know, and that my father knows, what is best for our people, and no beautiful woman, even you, Lady Sandra, in the moonlight and under the bright stars, would make me change the idea. No sreee. Not for all the rice in China.

SANDRA (*laughing*): Oh, Hali—you really are very beguiling.

HALI: Is it at me you laugh now—or my bad English?

SANDRA: A little of both—but it isn't unkind laughter.

HALI: Have I not made you a little ashamed with what I have said?

SANDRA: Yes—as a matter of fact you have.

HALI: That then is to the good.

SANDRA: You must accept your victory gracefully, Hali. There's no necessity to rub it in.

HALI: We are friends?

SANDRA: Of course we are. I really am sorry—I wouldn't have hurt your feelings for the world.

HALI: Whoopeel! You make my heart light.

SANDRA: Good. You haven't finished your drink.

HALI: I drink little. It is not well for me when I drink. Sometimes in my life I have been badly drunk and made great trouble.

SANDRA: You have that in common with several of my dearest friends.

HALI: Once at a party in the hills, I broke two people's heads—boum—like that—they crack together.

SANDRA: I've often wanted to do that, even when stone cold sober.

HALI: What is this music he plays now?

SANDRA (*listening*): A very old song—I haven't heard it for ages.

HALI: It is pretty.

SANDRA: It was tremendously popular years ago—it was played by barrel organs and dance orchestras—once it was even done by massed bands at the Aldershot Tattoo.

HALI: What please is that?

SANDRA: A lot of soldiers marching about for a week in Hampshire.

HALI: You will dance with me, please?

SANDRA (*startled*): Oh—do you really think that would be a good idea?

HALI: Why not—I dance with much grace and ease.

SANDRA: I'm sure you do, but don't you think we should look rather silly swirling about out here all by ourselves?

HALI: Who would see us?

SANDRA: Well, almost anybody really—Sanyamo might come in—he's a very correct butler—it might fluster him.

HALI: Sanyamo is himself a most alert dancer—ever since he was a little boy he has danced—did you not know that?

SANDRA: No—actually the subject never happened to come up.

HALI: Please, Lady Sandra. It would be such pleasure to me.

SANDRA: Very well, Hali—if you insist.

She dances with him. While they are doing so, CUCKOO comes in. She sees them and stands transfixed with horror.

CUCKOO: Lady Alexandra.

SANDRA (*disengaging herself from HALI's arms*): Why, Cuckoo—I thought you had gone ages ago.

CUCKOO: I've been waiting for Edward. He's getting the car. I came back for my bag.

HALI (*picking it up from a chair*): Is this it?

CUCKOO (*taking it—icily*): Thank you—it is.

SANDRA (*to HALI*): You know, if we are going to take to dancing seriously on this verandah we must do something about the floor. It's like nougat.

CUCKOO: I apologise for intruding.

SANDRA: Please don't, it couldn't matter less. Mind you, if we had been doing something really complicated, such as Hali whirling me round his head like an Indian club, a sudden interruption might have been fatal, but as it is there's no harm done.

Edward comes in.

EDWARD: Ah, there you are, Hali Alani. You've parked your car just in front of mine and I can't get out. If you'll give me your keys I can move it.

HALI: I will come myself—I am so sorry. Excuse me, please, Lady Sandra?

HALI and EDWARD go out.

There is silence for a moment. SANDRA takes a cigarette and lights it.

SANDRA (*handing CUCKOO the box*): I'm so sorry—cigarette?

CUCKOO: No, thank you.

SANDRA: What's the matter, Cuckoo? You look depressed. Has Edward got the snuffles again?

CUCKOO: I am not depressed, but I am a little upset.

SANDRA: Did you get into an argument with Boffin?

CUCKOO: I think Mr. Kennedy is the rudest man I ever met.

SANDRA: What nonsense, Cuckoo. He's perfectly charming. You must have provoked him. What on earth did you say to make him take against you?

CUCKOO: Whether Mr. Kennedy takes against me or not isn't of the faintest interest to me. It's not that that's upsetting me.

SANDRA: Perhaps it was those crayfish at dinner? George loves them but personally I can never get at them—to me they're a form of occupational therapy.

CUCKOO: It's nothing to do with the crayfish.

SANDRA: It couldn't have been the lamb. It was dull, I grant you, but there was nothing malign about it.

CUCKOO: You are purposely misunderstanding me.

SANDRA: Perhaps, Cuckoo. It's sometimes quite a wise plan, you know.

CUCKOO (*with a rush*): I must say what's on my mind, Sandra. And if you think I'm interfering, it can't be helped. I'm like that and always have been.

SANDRA: Like what?

CUCKOO: If anything's worrying me I just have to come straight out with it.

SANDRA: That must make your life rather convulsive socially.

CUCKOO: I'm your friend, Sandra, you really must believe that.

SANDRA: It may be idiotic of me, but I always believe that everyone is my friend until I have definite proof to the contrary.

CUCKOO: I've lived in the Colonies much longer than you have and I know—I really know.

SANDRA (*quietly*): What do you know, Cuckoo?

CUCKOO: Where to draw the line.

SANDRA: That particular knowledge seems temporarily to have forsaken you.

CUCKOO: I know you think I'm interfering but it can't be helped.

SANDRA: You said that before.

CUCKOO: You must not do these things, Sandra—you really must not!

SANDRA: What things?

CUCKOO: Hali Alani is all very well in his way.

SANDRA: That's all we can any of us hope to be.

CUCKOO: In fact, I'm sure he's very fascinating and attractive——

SANDRA: If this is your idea of coming straight out with something, I have news for you.

CUCKOO: What I mean to say is—that in your position here you cannot afford to—to hob-nob with the natives. You really cannot.

SANDRA (*with a sigh*): Oh, Cuckoo. You are making the most cracking fool of yourself. Do please stop.

GEORGE *comes in. He is carrying his coat over his arm.*

GEORGE: Hallo, my love. I thought everyone had gone.

SANDRA: They nearly have. Hali is moving his car so that Edward can take Cuckoo home.

GEORGE (*sensing that all is not well*): Have I interrupted a little private chat?

SANDRA: Cuckoo has been advising me on the technique of Colonial social procedure. She has an unerring grip on inessentials.

BOFFIN *comes in.*

BOFFIN: Has anyone thought of doing anything about that piano?

SANDRA: It's tuned regularly.

BOFFIN: I meant something more drastic than that, like throwing it into the sea.

SANDRA: Thank you for playing it anyway, dear Boffin. You've been a great comfort.

GEORGE (*going to the drink table*): How about a nightcap?

EDWARD and HALI *come back.*

EDWARD (*to CUCKOO*): I'm ready when you are, dear.

GEORGE: Won't you have a drink before you go?

EDWARD: No, thank you, sir.

HALI: I must say good-night, Your Excellency. It has been an evening of great delight.

GEORGE: I hope my wife has been looking after you all right?

HALI: Lady Sandra, like always, has been most kind.

SANDRA: We've been walking in the garden, George. It was all highly romantic, and I gave him a tuberose,

and later we had a fascinating little chat about public conveniences.

EDWARD (*in horror*): A tuberose—oh dear! (*He sneezes*).

SANDRA: Now that must be mental suggestion, Edward. You couldn't possibly have smelt it from right over there.

HALI (*advancing to SANDRA*): Lady Sandra—

SANDRA (*with sudden decision*): Just a moment, Hali. (*She gives a swift look at CUCKOO.*) George.

GEORGE: Yes, dear?

SANDRA: Hali has very kindly said that he would take me to Mitzi Radlett's party at the club. You know she invited us both and I never did a thing about it.

GEORGE: It's a bit late to drive all that way, isn't it?

SANDRA: Not really late—and I don't feel in the least like going to bed.

GEORGE: Well, I do, I must say.

SANDRA: Ah, darling, but you've been working, while I've merely been enjoying myself. As a matter of fact I still am.

GEORGE: I still think it's a bit late to go careering about the island.

SANDRA: You can't call just going to the dear old Opula club careering about the island.

GEORGE: Are you going, Cuckoo?

CUCKOO: I certainly am not.

GEORGE: Oh, of course, I forgot, you and Mitzi had a bit of a dust-up, didn't you?

CUCKOO: Not at all—it is merely that . . .

EDWARD: Never mind all that now, dear . . .

GEORGE: Do you feel like going, Boffin?

BOFFIN: Well—I . . .

SANDRA: I've been trying to talk him into it for hours but he was adamant. He says his head is still splitting from the plane and he thinks he's starting a summer cold. How is your head now, dear?

BOFFIN: Just turning round and round.

GEORGE: Try some Phensic.

SANDRA: I've had some put by his bed.

BOFFIN: You think of everything, dear.

SANDRA: Hali will look after me and drive me back all right—won't you, Hali?

HALI: For me it will be the great pleasure to drive you anywhere you wish, Lady Sandra.

SANDRA: How sweet of you—thank you so much. As a matter of fact, Chris is at the party already and he can bring me home quite easily. Anyhow, I shall only stay a little while, just to make a politeness. (*She kisses GEORGE.*) Good-night, darling.

GEORGE: Well, if you must go you must, I suppose. Run along and enjoy yourself.

SANDRA: Don't forget to have a light breakfast in the morning because there's curry for lunch. Good-night, Edward—do try to wipe from your mind anything in the least floral. Boffin, darling, I do hope you sleep well and wake up feeling smooth and ironed out. The room you're in is rather stuffy, I'm afraid—you'd better do what I do and throw everything wide open.

BOFFIN: You're telling me!

SANDRA: Come along, Hali—we really must not dawdle any more—we should have been there hours ago. (*She snatches up her cloak and bag and slips her arm through HALI's.*) Good-night, Cuckoo. I'm afraid you've had a beastly evening what with one thing and

another. She's in rather a state, Edward, so you'd better keep your eye on her—and for Heaven's sake see that she doesn't hob-nob with anyone peculiar on the way home.

SANDRA *and* HALI *go off*.

THE LIGHTS FADE

ACT II: SCENE II

SCENE: *The scene is Hali Alani's house.*

TIME: *About three hours have elapsed since the preceding Act.*

The Beach House is a small shack on the edge of the sea at Paiana Bay on the north-east coast of the island. In order to reach it from Pendarla, the capital, it is necessary to drive over the mountains and through Lailanu Pass, one of the most famous beauty spots of the island, and descend through sugar-cane and banana plantations to the sea.

The shack is comfortably furnished with beach furniture imported from America. This has been embellished by a few Samolan ideas. There are, for instance, two native war drums in one corner, a carved wooden screen painted in bizarre colours, a curtain made of scarlet native beads hanging over the door on the left which leads to the kitchenette, the shower and changing room. There is also, prominently displayed, a shining and hideous cocktail cabinet. Along the back wall are shuttered windows opening on to the verandah and the beach. The main door is on the right.

When the curtain rises, moonlight is shining strongly through the shutters and there is the muffled roar of the surf pounding on the reef a half a mile away. There is the sound of a car drawing up outside, then, after a moment or two HALI comes in and switches on the lights. SANDRA follows him. He takes her cloak and lays it on the divan. He then flings open the shutters of one of the windows.

SANDRA: Do you always drive as fast as that?

HALI: Only when I am gay and happy.

SANDRA: I must try to think of something to depress you on the way back.

HALI: You are not still angry with me?

SANDRA: I think I'm too sleepy to be angry—I'm just resigned.

HALI: We will have the little drink and then you will be no more sleepy.

SANDRA: No, thank you, Hali.

HALI: It is with such pride and pleasure that I bring you here—it is so beautiful and peaceful and there is always the sound of the sea—it is cool too, on this side of the island at night.

SANDRA: I suspect that it will be even cooler in Government House in the morning.

HALI: Nobody need ever know that we make this little adventure. It will be the quiet secret between you and me.

SANDRA: Nonsense, Hali—it will be no such thing—I detest having quiet secrets with anybody—it makes me nervous.

HALI: The whole evening has taken the nose-dive.

SANDRA: It certainly has.

HALI: I have offended you by doing the quick impulsive thing when I should have carefully thought. I would not offend you for all the tea in China.

SANDRA: Rice.

HALI: It is optional.

SANDRA: Anyhow, you haven't offended me—you've merely made me feel rather silly. I know it was all my own fault in the first place but that doesn't make

it any better—and as for that ass Cuckoo—I'd like to throttle her.

HALI: Was it because of her that you had the swift idea about going to the party?

SANDRA: Yes—it was.

HALI: Because she saw that we danced—and you are the Governor's lady and I am the wrong colour?

SANDRA: Let's go back now, please; Hali—it's been great fun—but the fun's over.

HALI: One small drink?

SANDRA: No, thank you.

HALI: Please, Lady Sandra—to show that you are forgiving me.

SANDRA: I've quite forgiven you—except for driving like a maniac—as I said before, it's all been my own fault—and if I hadn't been half-asleep after that idiotic party of Mitzi's, I should have noticed where we were going before we got nearly to the top of the mountains.

HALI: You did not enjoy driving through Lailanu Pass and looking at the great peaks like black fingers in the sky, and the moon shining far away on the sea?

SANDRA: Of course I did—it was lovely.

HALI: To come here was so little further—I wanted so much for you to see it——

SANDRA: I know, Hali—but you must realise——

HALI: I realise that I make the bitter mistake—I am most, most sorry.

SANDRA: There's no reason to be so utterly miserable, Hali—it doesn't matter all that much.

HALI: Please, one drink before we go?

SANDRA (*giving in*): All right—just one, then—and a very small one at that.

HALI (*delighted*): That is good—my heart begins

to rise up. I will mix you the kala-kala as it should be right and proper—I have the special mellowed bottles here—most ancient—my father gave them to me.

SANDRA: A very nice paternal thought.

HALI (*at the drink cabinet*): In the old days they drink it with ground kri-kri nuts and most hot peppers, but the custom died out.

SANDRA: I'm so glad.

HALI: The missionaries said it was wicked because it made too much excitement and people forgot the new Lord God and went back to Old Tikki and Fum-fumbolo.

SANDRA: What are they?

HALI: Volcanoes.

SANDRA: Most appropriate.

HALI: I will get the ice from the frig—I will be two shakes.

SANDRA: The G is soft, Hali.

HALI: You would see the kitchen? It is the last word in daring modern innovations.

SANDRA: By all means.

They both go off left.

HALI (*off*): One moment, I have forgotten the little pail.

He comes in again—goes to the drink cabinet, pours himself out a tumbler of neat kala-kala, drinks it at one gulp, sighs with satisfaction, picks up the ice pail and goes off again.

(*Off.*) Hey presto—under the tap she goes.

There is the sound of an ice tray clanking into the sink.

(*Off.*) You would like to scramble the eggs, perhaps?

SANDRA: No, thank you—I gave that up in the late thirties.

HALI: One moment—I will put back the tray.

SANDRA: No—you take the bucket—I'll put the tray back.

HALI: It came all the way from Detroit, Michigan.

SANDRA: What did?

HALI: The frig.

He comes in with the ice bucket, goes to the drink cabinet, quickly pours himself out another kala-kala, gulps it down, and is busy mixing the drinks when SANDRA returns.

HALI: You like this shining cabinet for the drink?

SANDRA (*evasively*): I'm sure it's very useful.

HALI: That came all the way from Detroit, Michigan, too.

SANDRA: Obviously a very up-and-coming little town.

HALI: There—(*he hands her a glass*)—now we drink—but we must make the Toast——

SANDRA: Must we?

HALI: I will say to you in Samolan words—'Welcome to my house—to my father's house, to the house of my father's father'—'Lanialu i kin awa-lali a um koka a um koka um koka.'

SANDRA: Thank you, Hali—that sounded very gracious. (*She drinks and gasps.*) My God! It's dynamite!

HALI (*drinking his at one go*): You should not sip, Lady Sandra—it should be drinking—boum—like sol

SANDRA: No, thank you—I've been caught like that before.

HALI: You would like to swim?

SANDRA (*startled*): Swim!

HALI: At night the water is warm and smooth to the hot body—it is ripping.

SANDRA: I'm sure it is—but I would really rather go home now, if you don't mind.

HALI: You would like me to play the drums?

SANDRA: Another time I would simply adore it—but as it is getting late, I think——

HALI: They are war drums—King Kefumalani gave them to my father's great father.

SANDRA: How very sweet of him.

HALI: King Kefumalani was the last King of Samolo. He was assassinated because he made curious practices. (*He pours himself another drink.*)

SANDRA: Please don't have any more, Hali—you have to drive.

HALI (*laughing gaily*): You will have one more, too.

SANDRA: I most certainly will not.

HALI: Then I will not either. (*He puts down the glass.*) There.

SANDRA: Good—that's very considerate of you.

HALI: But I will play the drums—just once.

SANDRA (*sighing hopelessly and sitting down*): Very well.

HALI: They were not only used for war—they were used for great high jinks also. Which would you like me to play?

SANDRA: Frankly, Hali—whichever is the quickest.

HALI: When the drums start there is no time any more—you will see——

SANDRA (*glancing at her wrist-watch*): Three minutes drum playing and then home—that is my final word.

HALI (*gleefully*): We shall see—— Oh, we shall very much see! (*He drinks his drink at one gulp and goes over to the drums.*)

SANDRA (*protesting*): Hah! You said you wouldn't—

HALI (*at the drums*): Listen—listen——

He begins to play the drums, quite softly at first with his

fingers, then more quickly and more loudly, until he is thumping with all the force of his hands. SANDRA watches him in dismay. It is obvious that he is becoming more and more excitable. He begins to sway his body to the rhythm and give little grunts. Finally she gets up and goes over to him.

SANDRA: Hali—stop it——

He pays no attention.

Stop it at once, do you hear me!

He continues to beat the drums louder and louder. She tries once more vainly to make him stop, then she pulls his arms away and kicks one of the drums over. He stands still quivering for a moment and then suddenly seizes her in his arms and kisses her passionately. She slaps his face, wrenches herself free, and runs to the other side of the room.

(*Furiously.*) How dare you behave like this—you must be out of your mind.

HALI: We will have one more beautiful little drink and you will forgive me.

SANDRA (*firmly*): I will never forgive you, Hali, unless you drive me home at once and stop all this idiotic nonsense.

HALI (*at the drink cabinet*): You have been very rude, Lady Sandra—very rude indeed.

SANDRA: Now, look here, Hali——

HALI (*pouring himself a stiff drink*): You have pushed over the drum that King Kefumalani gave to my father's great father. That was most vulgar.

SANDRA (*trying to control the situation*): Will you please sit down for a moment, Hali—quite quietly—I want you to listen to what I have to say—it is very important.

HALI: I will not sit down.

SANDRA: All right—stand up then.

HALI: I will sit down. (*He sits rather suddenly on a chair.*)

SANDRA: Now then.

HALI: King Kefumalani was a wonderful man—he had great splendid teeth and——

SANDRA: Never mind about King Thingummyjig's teeth for the moment——

HALI: He loved my father's great father—that is why he gave him the drum—and you—a high lady from England come all the way to Samolo and kick it over—that is bad, bad, bad.

SANDRA: All right, I'll pick up the damned drum—there. (*She does so.*) Now are you satisfied?

HALI (*hopefully*): You would like me to play a little more?

SANDRA: No, I wouldn't. I want you to be quiet for a minute and listen.

HALI: If I am quiet and listen, I hear the sea, and if I hear the sea when my heart is low and unhappy, I cry, and if I cry I go on and on and on and it is most ghastly.

SANDRA: Well, just forget about the sea, there's a dear and listen to me—I want you to give me the key of the car so that I can drive home. If you wish to come with me, please do. If, on the other hand, you would prefer to stay here and really enjoy yourself with the drums I will send somebody back with the car for you.

HALI: It is a very beautiful car—it came all the way from Detroit, Michigan.

SANDRA: They ought to give you the Freedom of the City.

HALI (*dreamily*): All the long weary way across the sea it came—from——

SANDRA: I'm not interested for the moment in where it came from, Hali, but where it's going to—and it's going back to Government House with me in it—and at once. Please give me the key.

HALI: Umpa tishi twazi makebolo.

SANDRA (*irritably*): What does that mean?

HALI: They are very disgusting words—I would rather not say.

SANDRA: Give me the key of the car please, Hali.

HALI: That is most pretty.

SANDRA: What is?

HALI (*pointing to her sapphire and diamond clip*): That—what does it mean, please?

SANDRA: It doesn't mean anything—it's just a clip.

HALI: I will give you a ruby that will mean much—I have many jewels.

SANDRA: I would rather have the key of the car.

HALI: You are not making enjoyment here?

SANDRA (*patiently and slowly*): No, Hali—it is very late—and I want to go home.

HALI: We will have one more sweet little drink——

SANDRA (*losing her temper*): I've had enough of this, Hali. I was willing to overlook your embarrassing behaviour of a few minutes ago because you were obviously working yourself into a frenzy with those idiotic drums and didn't know what you were doing. You are also very drunk indeed, and making an abject fool of yourself, and unless you give me the key of the car immediately and let me go away—I shall never speak to you again as long as I live.

HALI: You are angry now—that is bad news.

SANDRA: I am worse than angry. I'm bitterly disappointed in you and ashamed of myself.

HALI (*cheerfully*): Then we will dance. There is no music but I will make the rhythm with my feet. (*He advances towards her.*)

SANDRA (*backing*): Please don't come near me.

HALI: But we cannot possibly dance one at each side of the room—it would look sickening.

SANDRA (*almost shrieking*): I don't want to dance!

HALI: Then we will drink.

SANDRA (*having an idea*): All right—we'll drink—where's your glass.

HALI (*delighted*): That is good—that is magnificent—that is a knock-out! You are a true blue sport.

SANDRA (*at the drink cabinet, pouring him a full tumbler*): Here.

HALI (*taking it*): You too, please.

SANDRA: No—I've had enough.

HALI: Then I will not—it is no fun.

SANDRA: Very well—to hell with it! (*She pours herself a drink and drinks it at one go.*) There——

HALI (*drinking his*): Wonderful—wonderful! This is the cat's whiskers!

SANDRA (*clutching her throat*): Oh, dear!

HALI: Do not mind—the sharp feeling will pass in a moment and the glow will begin.

SANDRA (*in a strangled voice*): That was very, very silly of me.

HALI: Wait a little—you will see how jolly you will be—you will be dancing and singing about the room and making wisecracks.

SANDRA: I shall be doing nothing of the sort.

HALI: You do not know the real old kala-kala—it makes strange magic inside.

SANDRA: That's what I'm afraid of.

HALI: You must be brave. You must burn the boats.

SANDRA: I've already singed my digestive tract.

HALI: In the old days at the big wedding ceremonials they would drink kala-kala for three days and nights.

SANDRA: That must have made the honeymoon fairly unnecessary.

HALI: But the missionaries stopped that too.

SANDRA: Spoilsports! (*She laughs.*)

HALI (*triumphantly*): There—now it begins.

SANDRA: What begins?

HALI: You start to feel larky.

SANDRA: Oh, Hali, you do say the most idiotic things.

HALI: Please to sit down.

SANDRA (*sitting*): Certainly. (*She biccups.*) There now!

HALI: That is very lucky.

SANDRA: Who for?

HALI: You must have some more—swiftly.

SANDRA: No, I mustn't. (*She biccups again.*) Damn.

HALI (*pouring her another drink*): Here—do not this time drink at one swallow—sip gently——

SANDRA: I don't want it, I tell you.

HALI: It is the sure cure—you must.

SANDRA (*taking the glass*): "A little learning is a dang'rous thing; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;—There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,—And drinking largely sobers us again." Pope. (*She empties her glass at one gulp again.*) Oh dear, I forgot to sip.

HALI: Pope?

SANDRA: Yes—I learnt it when I was a tiny little girl.

HALI: You are a Catholic?

SANDRA (*giggling*): No, no, no—not the Pope—just Pope.

HALI: I do not understand.

SANDRA: He was a poet and he wrote a lot of lovely things—“And mistress of herself though China fall”—How extraordinary that I should remember that. Alexander Pope—Born 1688—Died 1744. There now.

HALI (*patiently*): Please explain.

SANDRA: Then there was “Little Lamb who made thee?” but I think that was Blake.

HALI: I will have more drink.

SANDRA: Why not? Why not indeed? “The dew was falling fast, the stars begin to blink; I heard a voice; it said ‘Drink, pretty creature, drink.’”

HALI (*at the drink cabinet*): I beg your pardon—I do not quite catch——

SANDRA: William Wordsworth—Born 1770—Died 1850. I won a prize for reciting poetry at Roedean, you know.

HALI: What is Roedean?

SANDRA: It’s a girl’s school in Sussex. The air is tremendously bracing.

HALI: Is that a good thing?

SANDRA: Now I come to look back on it I’m not quite sure. I was also captain of the cricket team for seven months. I can’t think how I could have been so versatile.

HALI: I fear I find myself at the sea again.

SANDRA: Would you like me to sing you the school song? It's very inspiring.

HALI (*delighted*): You will really sing to me?

SANDRA: Why not? We must all pull our weight in the boat.

HALI: That will be more than delightful. I am excessively musical.

SANDRA (*getting up a trifle unsteadily and raising her glass*): Wait a minute—I can't remember the first line—oh yes—— (*She sings.*)

O, the cricket First Eleven

Is the best in all the land.

It's the one above all others

We admire on every hand.

May your scores be never failing

And your bowling ever true,

O Noble First Eleven

Here's our best of healths to you.

HALI (*confused but appreciative*): That was most catchy.

SANDRA: They've gone.

HALI: Who?

SANDRA: My hiccups. Please count ten slowly, will you.

HALI: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

SANDRA: Once more, please.

HALI: One, two, three, four, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

SANDRA: You missed out five. You *are* silly. (*She laughs inordinately.*)

HALI (*pleased*): You are happy again now?

SANDRA: Happy as a bee—busy as a sandboy.

HALI: I do not understand.

SANDRA: Which pocket do you keep the key of the car in?

HALI (*tapping his right hand trouser pocket*): This one. But we will not talk about the car any more—— It is not cheerful—we will swim.

SANDRA (*meditatively*): Swim like a fish—drink like a fish—“And under that Almighty fin—the littlest fish shall enter in”—Rupert Brooke.

HALI: You are perhaps a little drunk? That is very gay and most funny.

SANDRA: Tight as a tick—tight as a drum—— (*she looks puzzled.*)

HALI (*eagerly*): You would like me to play the drum?

SANDRA: Please do—it would be delightful.

HALI (*surprised*): You would really like?

SANDRA: But certainly—I adore drums—all sorts of drums—big drums—little drums—kettle drums—oil drums—car drums——

HALI (*pleased*): You see—you are beginning to make the jokes.

SANDRA: I can do better than that—just give me time.

HALI: You would like another drink?

SANDRA (*taking out her compact*): Yes, please.

HALI (*gratified*): You really would?

SANDRA (*shaking out her powder puff*): Immensely—I would like to drink a toast to Cuckoo.

HALI (*at the drink cabinet*): She is a stupid cow.

SANDRA: Her motives are pure and she speaks straight from the shoulder. She has told everybody on the island that I have had my face lifted. (*She looks at herself in the glass.*) I wish to God I had!

HALI: Your face is most glorious.

SANDRA: That's going a little far, but thank you all the same.

HALI (*bringing her her drink*): Here is the drink.

SANDRA: Put it down on that dear little table—I will sip it rhythmically while you are playing the drums.

HALI: That will be good.

SANDRA (*sweetly*): You are still quite determined not to give me the key of the car—before you start, I mean?

HALI (*petulantly*): Oh, no, no, no—please to not start the argument again.

SANDRA: All right—all right—be it on your own head— Fire away.

HALI (*enchanted*): Haha—the evening is once more the smasherool

He goes to the drums and begins to thump them again, softly at first then more loudly. SANDRA gets up, a trifle unsteadily and watches him. Then she begins to dance very slightly to the rhythm he is beating. He sees her and gives a loud crow of delight.

HALI (*chanting*): Aouna lu trebi—Aouna lu karoma—
E slunga klabongal

SANDRA (*still dancing but shouting to make herself heard*): What does that mean?

HALI (*also shouting gleefully*): I will tell you later—when we swim in the warm sea——

He bangs louder and louder and begins to grunt again. SANDRA dances round him twice in a widening circle. On her second time round she picks up a bottle from the drink cabinet and cracks him on the back of the head with it. He gives a slight groan and staggers back against her—he seizes her in his arms and falls to the ground, dragging her with

him. After a while she wriggles free from him and gets up. She stands looking at him anxiously for a moment, then kneels down and feels his heart—she gives a sigh of relief—then plunges her hand into his trouser pocket—finds the key of the car and scrutinises it carefully.

SANDRA: "Do not lift him from the bracken—leave him lying where he fell"—William Edmondstone Aytoun. Born 1813. Died 1865.

She snatches up her cloak and bag and runs out of the room.

THE LIGHTS FADE.

ACT III: SCENE I

The scene is the verandah. The time is about eight o'clock in the morning.

There is a breakfast table centre. There is also a side table upon which are covered dishes, coffee and tea, etc.

When the curtain rises GEORGE is just finishing his breakfast and reading, desultorily, the Samolan Daily Reaper. CHRISTOPHER comes in. He is wearing jodhpurs and an open shirt.

GEORGE: Good morning, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER: Good morning, sir.

GEORGE: Been riding?

CHRISTOPHER: Yes—just to shake up the liver a bit after Mitzi's champagne.

GEORGE: Was it a good party?

CHRISTOPHER: It turned into a bit of a rout before the end.

GEORGE: Did you bring Lady A. back?

CHRISTOPHER: No, she left with Hali Alani. She arrived with him too. It caused quite a sensation.

GEORGE: Why the devil should it?

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, I don't know. It was a sort of a surprise, that's all. I don't think Mitzi quite expected her.

GEORGE: Well, she invited her—she invited us both.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, had she? I didn't know.

GEORGE: You should have driven her home.

CHRISTOPHER: I offered to, but she said no. You see, I was a bit involved myself.

GEORGE: Oh, you were, were you?

CHRISTOPHER: You know how it is, sir.

GEORGE: Not being blessed with the gift of second sight, I do not.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, you see, I'd had a bit of a row with Sylvia last week at the tennis dance—and—well—we were making it up.

GEORGE: More's the pity.

CHRISTOPHER: I thought you liked Sylvia, sir.

GEORGE (*irritably*): It isn't a question of whether I like Sylvia, and I'm not particularly interested in whom you quarrel with, but you ought to have had enough sense to drive Lady A. home from the party.

CHRISTOPHER: But sir . . .

GEORGE: You say it caused a sensation when she arrived with Hali. You might have known it would cause still more of a sensation if she left with him. Why didn't you use your head?

CHRISTOPHER: As I told you, sir, I did offer to, but you see . . .

GEORGE: She ought never to have gone. Now we shall have the whole island gossiping.

BOFFIN *comes in*.

BOFFIN: Good morning, George.

GEORGE: Good morning. Did you sleep well?

BOFFIN: Beautifully. I feel ready for anything. Good morning, Captain Mortlock—how was the party?

CHRISTOPHER (*glumly*): Oh, it was all right.

BOFFIN: Did your hostess oblige with any of her side-splitting impersonations?

GEORGE: He was too busy giving an impersonation himself to notice. A very good impersonation of a damned bad A.D.C.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, sir!

GEORGE: Go on. Cut along and do a job of work, if you're capable of it. You get on my nerves.

CHRISTOPHER (*hurt*): Yes, sir.

He goes.

BOFFIN: Poor boy. You seem rather testy this morning. Is anything wrong?

GEORGE: I was ticking him off for not bringing Sandra home from the party.

BOFFIN: Perhaps she didn't want him to.

GEORGE: That's not the point. He should have done it whether she wanted him to or not.

BOFFIN: It might have caused a mild scandal if he had carried her off by force.

GEORGE: I've been kicking myself all night long.

BOFFIN: You must be exhausted.

GEORGE: I should never have let her go off alone with Hali in the first place.

BOFFIN: It didn't seem to me that you had much choice. Anyhow you started the whole thing yourself.

GEORGE: I know I did. But I didn't mean her to go cavorting about all over the island with him. You should have seen Cuckoo's face when they went off together!

BOFFIN: I did. It's not a face I care for.

GEORGE: She's probably been on the telephone to half the Colony by now.

SANDRA comes in. She is looking fresh and radiant but she is feeling dreadful. However she is making a valiant effort to over-ride it.

SANDRA (*kissing* GEORGE): Good morning, darling. Good morning, Boffin—I do hope that you slept like a top. You really were an angel last night to play that

hellish piano so beautifully. It absolutely saved the situation. I really must apologise for this barbarous idea of George's of having communal breakfast. I've tried to reason with him but he insists. He saw a country house comedy once in which everyone was frightfully witty all through the last act and kept on helping themselves to kedgeree.

GEORGE: You're very bright this morning.

SANDRA: Why shouldn't I be? I was up with the lark and sitting on my verandah sipping my early tea and watching the sunrise.

GEORGE: As your room faces due west, you must have had a periscope.

SANDRA: Don't be so crotchety, dear. I mean I was watching the *effect* of the sunrise. It was spectacular. First the mountains turned to pink, and then to mauve and blue, and all the palms and things looked emerald green and . . .

BOFFIN: Like between programmes at the Odeon.

SANDRA (*going over to the side-table*): Isn't anybody going to have anything to eat? (*She lifts the lid of one of the dishes.*) My God, there really *is* kedgereel

GEORGE: What time did you get home?

SANDRA: Oh, not very late. We didn't stay long.

GEORGE: You should have let Chris drive you back.

SANDRA (*helping herself sparingly to food*): Why?

GEORGE: It would have looked better.

SANDRA: What nonsense.

GEORGE: It isn't nonsense. You know how people talk.

SANDRA: Hali would have been bitterly hurt if I had suddenly abandoned him and gone home with Chris.

GEORGE: You oughtn't to have gone to the party alone with him in the first place.

SANDRA: If you didn't want me to, why didn't you say so?

GEORGE: You know perfectly well I couldn't, straight out in front of everyone.

SANDRA (*coming to the table with her plate*): Don't you think, darling, that you're being just the tiniest bit unreasonable? First, you ask me to use my 'woman's wiles' to fascinate Hali and induce him to modify his political opinions—which incidentally he hasn't the faintest intention of doing—then, when I suggested that he should take me to Mitzi's because you were too lazy to go—you were so enthusiastic that you practically tucked us into the car.

GEORGE: I was not enthusiastic. I tried to get Boffin to go with you.

SANDRA: Boffin had a splitting headache, didn't you, dear?

BOFFIN: Yes. I had wind under the heart as well and a touch of athlete's foot.

SANDRA (*to GEORGE*): And now you turn on me because I didn't leave poor Hali flat and come home in a haze of official sanctity with the A.D.C. Poor Chris was off duty anyhow, and making heavy weather with that girl with the vast bust—Sylvia something or other.

BOFFIN: "Who is Sylvia? What is she, that all our swains commend her?"

SANDRA (*automatically*): William Shakespeare. Born 1564. Died 1616.

CHRISTOPHER *comes back*.

CHRISTOPHER: The Chief of Police wants to see you, sir. He says it's urgent.

SANDRA (*involuntarily*): Oh! (*She gives a hiccup.*) There now!

GEORGE: What's the matter?

SANDRA: I've got hiccups again.

BOFFIN: Again?

SANDRA: I had them in the night.

GEORGE (*to CHRISTOPHER*): Tell Bob Frome to come out here.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, sir. (*He goes.*)

GEORGE: I wonder what the blazes is wrong now!

BOFFIN: Water off a steel knife.

GEORGE: What are you talking about?

BOFFIN: Sandra's hiccups.

SANDRA: Give me some kala-kala.

GEORGE: You can't drink that stuff at eight o'clock in the morning.

SANDRA: Why not? What's the time of day got to do with it? (*She hiccups.*) Damn!

BOFFIN (*bringing her a glass of water and a knife from the side table*): Here—try the water cure first.

SANDRA (*gloomily*): It won't do any good.

BOFFIN: Don't take up a defeatist attitude at the outset. Try to have faith.

SANDRA: Kala-kala's stronger than any faith. That's why the missionaries took such a dim view of it.

BOFFIN: Missionaries?

SANDRA: I never really cared much for missionaries but I must admit that every once in a while they had very sound ideas.

BOFFIN (*pouring the water out of one glass into another over a knife*): Now—drink it slowly.

SANDRA: White Man's magic. (*She hiccups.*) Oh dear.

GEORGE: You oughtn't to have gone to the party alone with him in the first place.

SANDRA: If you didn't want me to, why didn't you say so?

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ROBERT FROME *comes in, followed by CHRISTOPHER who stands near the rail.*

GEORGE: Good morning, Bob. What's wrong?

BOB: Quite a lot, I'm afraid, sir. (*He looks round at everyone.*)

GEORGE: Would you rather talk to me alone?

BOB: Well—as a matter of fact——

SANDRA: I must know what's happened. Boffin and I are perfectly trustworthy. We won't say a word if it's all that secret.

BOB: I'm afraid it won't be a secret long, anyhow.

SANDRA: They've gone.

BOB: I beg your pardon?

SANDRA: Never mind. Go on.

BOB: Actually I'm glad you're here, Lady A. I want to see you rather particularly.

GEORGE: Don't be so damned mysterious, Bob. Let's have it. What's happened?

BOB: It's Hali Alani. He's had his head bashed in.

SANDRA: Bashed *in*? Oh, surely not!

BOB: He's in the hospital now, with concussion.

GEORGE: This is serious. When did it happen?

BOB: Some time in the early hours of the morning. He was found in his beach house at Paiana Bay—unconscious.

GEORGE: Who found him?

BOB: The local policeman there. He noticed the lights were on in the bungalow, so he thought he'd better check up. He knocked and got no answer, and so he went in and found Hali lying on the floor. Apparently someone had crept up behind him and hit him on the head with a bottle.

SANDRA: How sordid!

GEORGE: Any finger-prints?

BOB: My chaps are working on that now.

SANDRA: Are they, really?

BOB: Yes—I sent them out there an hour ago.

SANDRA: Very efficient.

BOB: I understand that you accompanied Hali Alani to Mrs. Radlett's party at the Opula Club, Lady A.?

SANDRA: Yes, I did.

BOB: Can you remember at what time you left the party?

SANDRA: No—not exactly. Chris was there. He saw us go. What time would you say it was, Chris?

CHRISTOPHER: Oh—round about twelve-thirty, I should think.

BOB (*to SANDRA*): And he drove you straight back here?

SANDRA (*lighting a cigarette*): Of course.

BOB: He drove the car himself? There was no chauffeur?

SANDRA: No, I only wish there had been. Hali drives terribly fast. I can't bear being driven terribly fast, can you, Boffin?

BOFFIN: It *can* be fun if you stick to the wrong side of the road.

SANDRA (*with vivacity*): It makes me quite frantic. My foot keeps pressing down on an imaginary brake or an imaginary clutch. I suppose if one didn't drive oneself it wouldn't be so bad. It's like professional pilots flying on commercial airlines as passengers. They go through absolute tortures on account of *knowing* that something's wrong ages before anyone else does. Do you remember, George, last year when Bogey Watling told us about his plane having to make a forced

landing in a frightening swamp somewhere or other? He said that . . .

GEORGE: Never mind about Bogey Watling now, my love. Go on, Bob.

BOB: Whoever committed the crime must have pinched the car too.

GEORGE: Pinched the car?

BOB: Yes. It was found smashed up in a ditch about a mile away from here.

SANDRA: How extraordinary!

BOB (*to SANDRA*): You say that Hali dropped you here at approximately twelve-forty-five?

SANDRA: Yes. I suppose it would be about that time if we left the club at twelve-thirty.

BOB: That means he would have got to the beach house at Paiana at approximately one-forty-five if he dropped you here at twelve-forty-five. It isn't very far to Paiana as the crow flies but that road over the pass is so twisty that even Hali couldn't drive very fast on it.

SANDRA: Oh, yes he could. (*She recoils herself.*) I mean—judging by the way we shot up here—I mean he's quite capable of hurtling up and down the mountains like a bullet out of a gun.

BOBFIN: A confused metaphor.

BOB: Well, thank you very much, Lady A. I won't bother you any more for the moment.

SANDRA: But you're not bothering me in the least, Bob. I'm only too delighted to help in any way I can. Poor Hali. What could he have been up to in a sinister little beach house all alone?

GEORGE: Perhaps he wasn't all alone.

BOB: He certainly wasn't. We have every proof of that.

SANDRA: What kind of proof?

BOB: Well, there were signs that a fairly drunken orgy had taken place.

SANDRA: Disgusting!

BOFFIN: What sort of signs?

BOB: Oh, you know—the usual thing—cigarette-ends, empty bottles, broken glasses, furniture all over the place.

SANDRA: It sounds like poor Alice's flat in Curzon Street.

GEORGE: We don't want to hear about poor Alice at the moment, my dear.

SANDRA: I know you never liked her, but she had a certain frowsy charm, hadn't she, Boffin?

BOFFIN: Frowsy is the operative word.

GEORGE: We'd better go into my office, Bob. We shan't be interrupted there.

SANDRA: You can't. It's being 'done'. I saw seven maids with seven mops ambling towards it a little while ago.

GEORGE (*to* BOB): You say Hali had someone else there with him, and that he'd been drinking?

BOB: Yes, sir.

SANDRA: But I always thought Hali was virtually a teetotaller.

BOB: He kicks over the traces sometimes. Once, at a party in the hills, he cracked two people's skulls together.

SANDRA: Perhaps it was one of them who cracked his last night. After all, fair's fair.

GEORGE: This is no moment for flippancy, Sandra. It's damned serious.

SANDRA: I'm so surprised at Hali turning out to be a

dipsol! Why, we had literally to force him to have even one cocktail here last night, didn't we? You were here yourself, Bob. You saw.

BOB: He was on his best behaviour here, naturally.

SANDRA: I don't know why you say naturally. Cuckoo certainly wasn't on *her* best behaviour.

GEORGE: What's Cuckoo got to do with it?

SANDRA: A great deal. Cuckoo is responsible for more than you realise, George. She's a pompous, self-righteous, meddling ass.

BOFFIN: Hear, hear!

SANDRA: And the next time she brings her half-witted, adenoidal children here I'll kick them into the gold-fish pond.

BOB: I think I'd better be getting along now, sir.

GEORGE: Yes. I think perhaps you had.

BOB: Do you think I could do some telephoning from the A.D.C.'s room? It would save time.

GEORGE: Of course. Take him, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, sir.

BOB: Thank you again, Lady A. (To GEORGE) I'll keep you posted, sir, as to what happens.

GEORGE: Good. Thanks.

BOB and CHRISTOPHER go out.

SANDRA: Well! What an excitement!

GEORGE: I don't like this. I don't like this at all.

SANDRA: Give me some more coffee, will you, Boffin?

BOFFIN (taking her cup and going to the side-table): Black or white?

SANDRA: Jet black, please, dear.

GEORGE: I wonder who the devil did it?

SANDRA (suddenly): Did what?

GEORGE: Tried to murder Hali, of course.

SANDRA: Murder! Really, George, aren't you being a little melodramatic?

GEORGE: Well, he had his head bashed in with a bottle.

SANDRA: Probably only in fun.

GEORGE: Was he drunk at Mitzi's party?

SANDRA: Of course he wasn't. He behaved exquisitely. There's a certain old world courtesy about Hali that I find most engaging. Didn't you notice it at dinner, Boffin?

BOFFIN: I was too riveted by Admiral Turling's conversation to notice anything else. I had no idea sailors' lives were so monotonous. As far as I could gather he had Mrs. Turling in every port.

GEORGE: I don't altogether trust that old-world courtesy. I suspect that underneath it he is a horse of quite a different colour.

SANDRA: Do you mean a dark-coloured horse or a coloured dark horse?

GEORGE: It's nothing to joke about. This business might lead to a lot of trouble—bad trouble.

SANDRA: I don't see any reason to make such a terrible issue of it. It's all quite obvious to me.

GEORGE: Oh, it is, is it?

SANDRA: Of course.

GEORGE: Perhaps you'll explain then, if you know so much about it.

SANDRA: I don't *know* anything. But I can make a pretty shrewd guess.

BOFFIN: So can I.

SANDRA (*shooting him a quick look*): What do you mean by that?

SANDRA: Of course. I couldn't very well have walked, could I? It's miles.

GEORGE: You'd be willing to swear to that in a court of law?

SANDRA: You always have to swear to everything in a court of law on account of them rushing at you with that little Bible.

GEORGE: Do you remember which sentry was on duty at the door last night?

SANDRA (*after an imperceptible pause*): Distinctly. The very tall thin one with the enormous Adam's apple.

GEORGE: Did you say good-night to him?

SANDRA: No. I didn't want to wake him.

GEORGE: Wake him! You mean he was asleep?

SANDRA: Fast asleep. And I for one don't blame him. Having to stand there hour after hour with nothing to look at but that awful old banyan tree. It's enough to give one the creeps.

GEORGE: You are telling me that the sentry on duty outside Government House was fast asleep?

SANDRA: If you say anything about it I shall never forgive you. I should hate to get the poor boy into trouble.

GEORGE: You are telling me the truth, Sandra, aren't you?

SANDRA: George, whatever is the matter with you? You're behaving exactly like one of those Agatha Christie detective inspectors with pin-stripe suits and bowler hats.

GEORGE: Are you or are you not telling me the truth?

SANDRA: Of course I am. Why on earth shouldn't I?

GEORGE: You left the party with Hali. He drove you back here . . .

like to remind you that this is a very hot and livery climate, far, far removed from the bracing, invigorating breezes of Huddersfield.

GEORGE: I haven't set foot in Huddersfield for fifteen years.

SANDRA: That in itself is a shameful admission and only proves how dismally ambition and the lust for power has corrupted you. A man who will ruthlessly abandon his own birthplace and cold-shoulder his childhood playmates merely for political advancement—the man who would do these things—the man who would so complacently betray his ideals, is most certainly not the man I married. Where—I ask you—is the man I married?

GEORGE: Standing directly in front of you, my love, and stop talking nonsense.

SANDRA: I am willing to forgive you for your curious behaviour this morning because it is my considered opinion that you are far from well.

GEORGE: Sandra . . .

SANDRA: Doctor Crosbie said only the other day when you were gorging those Bombay mangoes at lunch, that you were insulting your metabolism.

GEORGE: My metabolism, Sandra, has nothing whatever to do with the subject under discussion.

SANDRA: Of course if you wish to insult your metabolism from morning till night that is entirely your own affair. But for you to insult me with your base insinuations and lascivious inuendoes in front of poor Boffin who has come all the way out here to relax and bask in this glorious climate——

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GEORGE: You said just now that it was hot and livery.

SANDRA: I am going to my room. I have a great deal to do this morning, so I shall not see you again until luncheon, by which time I hope that you will have recovered your manners.

GROWN (*freely*): Once and for all, Sandra, did you or did you not go with Hali Mani to his beach house last night and bash him over the head with a bottle?

SANDRA: Certainly I did. And if you don't stop bellowing at me I'll do the same to you. Come, Boffin—

She retreats, followed by BOFFIN.

THE LIGHTS FADE.



ACT III: SCENE II

The verandah. About four hours later.

*As the curtain rises, SANYAMO comes in,
followed by PUNALO ALANI.*

SANYAMO: Excellency ha-anu watu dua moa.

PUNALO: Luka, Sanyamo.

SANYAMO: Punalo Alani koka kan gula?

PUNALO: O-o luka, Sanyamo. In this particular place it is more fitting that we speak English.

SANYAMO: Yes, sir, Punalo Alani. You will please to sit?

PUNALO (*seating himself*): Thank you.

SANYAMO: Cigarette?

PUNALO: No, thank you. Not for the moment.

SANYAMO: Your son Hali Alani was here last night.

PUNALO: Yes, I know.

SANYAMO: He is a strong, beautiful man. He walk long long time in garden with Lady Excellency and she give him white flower.

PUNALO: Did she indeed?

SANYAMO: Then they sit together on verandah quite close and talk and talk, and visiting gentleman play piano inside.

PUNALO: Thank you, Sanyamo.

SANYAMO: Then away they go—piff-paff in the motor-car—quick like light.

PUNALO: At what time did Lady Excellency return?

SANYAMO: Twenty-five minutes past four. I check with sentry.

GEORGE (*with rather overdone airiness*): Have it your own way.

PUNALO: The incident occurred at his beach house at Paiana Bay during the early hours of this morning.

GEORGE (*comfortingly*): I shouldn't attach too much importance to it if I were you. He was probably having a bit of a party with a few friends and someone spoke out of turn. Boys will be boys, you know.

PUNALO: My son has four wives, your Excellency. I think we may safely assume that he has passed the age of puberty.

GEORGE: Oh! He has four wives, has he? Nobody ever told me that before.

PUNALO: Only one is official according to the rites of the Christian faith. The other three are what you might call supplementary auxiliaries.

GEORGE: I might, but I doubt if I should.

PUNALO: The customs of a country when deeply embedded in centuries of tradition are difficult to uproot. That is the rock upon which many so-called progressive policies are apt to founder.

GEORGE: Possibly. But I gather that you didn't come all the way up here to discuss progressive policies or your son's domestic problems.

PUNALO: No, Your Excellency. I came to discuss yours.

GEORGE: Mine?

PUNALO: Yes. It seems to me, in view of the present unfortunate situation, that they might become considerably embarrassing.

GEORGE: What unfortunate situation? What are you talking about?

PUNALO: Good.

SANYAMO: She not come back through main gate. She climb through hibiscus hedge and creep softly up drive like mouse.

PUNALO: Did sentry see her?

SANYAMO: Yes. But he pretend look other way. He is very devoted to Lady Excellency. She give him Jacqmar scarf for his girl and rattle with small bell for baby.

PUNALO: I see.

SANYAMO: Nalcena spend two hours trying to fix Lady Excellency's evening shoes, but no use. They've had it.

PUNALO: Thank you, Sanyamo. You have told his Excellency that I am here?

SANYAMO: Yes. He come now.

GEORGE *comes in*. SANYAMO *bows and goes out*.

PUNALO *Alani rises*.

GEORGE (*shaking hands*): Good morning, Punalo Alani.

PUNALO: Your Excellency does me great honour.

GEORGE (*with slight brusqueness*): I got your message saying that you wanted to see me and that it was urgent.

PUNALO: That is so, Excellency.

GEORGE: Then sit down and tell me what's on your mind.

PUNALO: Very well. (*He sits*.) I presume that you are aware that my son Hali has met with a slight accident?

GEORGE: Yes. I believe I did hear something about it. He got beaten up, didn't he?

PUNALO: Beaten down I think would be a more accurate description.

GEORGE (*with rather overdone airiness*): Have it your own way.

PUNALO: The incident occurred at his beach house at Paiana Bay during the early hours of this morning.

GEORGE (*comfortingly*): I shouldn't attach too much importance to it if I were you. He was probably having a bit of a party with a few friends and someone spoke out of turn. Boys will be boys, you know.

PUNALO: My son has four wives, your Excellency. I think we may safely assume that he has passed the age of puberty.

GEORGE: Oh! He has four wives, has he? Nobody ever told me that before.

PUNALO: Only one is official according to the rites of the Christian faith. The other three are what you might call supplementary auxiliaries.

GEORGE: I might, but I doubt if I should.

PUNALO: The customs of a country when deeply embedded in centuries of tradition are difficult to uproot. That is the rock upon which many so-called progressive policies are apt to founder.

GEORGE: Possibly. But I gather that you didn't come all the way up here to discuss progressive policies or your son's domestic problems.

PUNALO: No, Your Excellency. I came to discuss yours.

GEORGE: Mine?

PUNALO: Yes. It seems to me, in view of the present unfortunate situation, that they might become considerably embarrassing.

GEORGE: What unfortunate situation? What are you talking about?

PUNALO: My son, as you are aware, is in a position of great political importance.

GEORGE: In that case perhaps it would be better if he were a teetotaller.

PUNALO: Sir Winston Churchill isn't.

GEORGE: Be that as it may, it seems to have little bearing on the present discussion.

PUNALO: I am willing to admit that my son occasionally disregards the responsibilities of his high office and behaves, shall we say, a trifle impetuously.

GEORGE: I wish you would come to the point, Punalo Alani.

PUNALO: Your wife—Lady Alexandra—

GEORGE: I think perhaps it would be as well if we left my wife's name out of this conversation.

PUNALO: That, I fear, is impossible, as she is the crux of the whole affair.

GEORGE (*his temper fraying*): What the devil do you mean?

PUNALO: You know perfectly well what took place last night at my son's beach house, don't you, Your Excellency?

GEORGE: What I know or do not know is beside the point. Please say what you have to say, as briefly as possible.

PUNALO: I agree. Time is infinitely precious to us. Unless we work swiftly and in the closest co-operation we shall be unable to avert a grave public scandal.

GEORGE: What on earth are you talking about?

PUNALO (*inexorably*): A scandal that will not only do irreparable damage to your wife's reputation, but that might possibly result in your being forced to resign your position as Governor of this island. That

would be a fatal blow to your career and a grievous deprivation for my people, who love and honour you both.

GEORGE: Skip the flowery compliments for the moment, Punalo. Whatever you may think you know and whatever you may think I know, you haven't got one shred of proof that my wife went to the beach house with Hali last night.

PUNALO: As a matter of fact, I have. Irrefutable proof.

GEORGE: What is it?

PUNALO: A sapphire and diamond clip inscribed, with some austerity, on the gold underpart 'Sandra from George'.

GEORGE: Give it to me at once!

PUNALO: That I cannot do. It is in my safe at home.

GEORGE: Who found it?

PUNALO: The night watchman. But do not be alarmed, he cannot read.

GEORGE: Why didn't you bring it with you?

PUNALO: It is better where it is for the moment.

GEORGE: I can hardly bring myself to believe that a man of your eminence could sink so low as this, Punalo Alani. How much do you want?

PUNALO: If you are suspecting me of blackmailing you for money, Your Excellency, you are very foolish. I am a considerably richer man than you are ever likely to be.

GEORGE: I have no idea what devious motive you have in all this, but whatever it is I'll have no part of it. Is that clear?

PUNALO: No, Your Excellency. That won't do, that won't do at all. For Heaven's sake put aside your pride and anger and reflect calmly for a moment. The situation

is too serious to be dismissed with a few bitter words.

GEORGE: I have no intention of being blackmailed by you or anybody else.

PUNALO (*suddenly raising his voice authoritatively*): Stop blustering, Your Excellency. You are in an extremely delicate position. We live in an age of publicity. If any mention of last night's regrettable incident gets into the local newspapers it will be only a matter of hours before it is headlined across the world.

GEORGE: Why should it get into the local newspapers?

PUNALO: The fact that my son was attacked is already known. Reporters and photographers have been besieging the hospital since early this morning. So far no statement has been made. But a statement must be made within the next few hours. A suitable culprit must be procured to confess to the attempted murder of my son.

GEORGE: Attempted murder! Damned nonsense!

PUNALO: It is also known that Lady Alexandra left Mrs. Radlett's party at the Opula Club alone with my son. Unless we can establish a water-tight alibi for her, nothing can save her from being hopelessly compromised.

GEORGE: Hali brought my wife back to this house last night at twelve-forty-five precisely.

PUNALO: To quote your own words at a recent meeting of the Executive Committee, "Do not let us build the structure of our policy upon the shifting sands of illusion."

GEORGE (*after a slight pause*): What did you mean just now when you said that a suitable culprit must be procured?

PUNALO (*with a faint smile*): Exactly what I said. Fortunately I have a few 'possibles' lined up already.

GEORGE: You mean that a man will be bribed to confess to a crime of which he is completely innocent?

PUNALO: Certainly. He will be tried and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. After a few days he will escape to one of the other islands. It is quite easy to arrange.

GEORGE (*exploding*): Of all the immoral, corrupt . . .

PUNALO: Try to be realistic, Your Excellency.

GEORGE: Do you seriously imagine that even in order to shield my wife I would allow a man to be convicted of a crime he didn't commit?

PUNALO: The choice lies between that and allowing your wife to be convicted in the eyes of the world of a crime she did commit.

GEORGE: Crimel She was defending her honour from the disgusting advances of your inebriated son.

PUNALO: Your wife is a very attractive and charming woman. And as you said yourself a little while ago, "Boys will be boys."

GEORGE: What is your object in all this, Punalo Alani?

PUNALO: I wish to save Lady Alexandra from the degradation of a public scandal. I am devoted to her. We all are. I should hate to see her subjected to the vulgarities of modern journalism. I can visualise only too clearly the inevitable headlines: 'Governor's Wife in Beach House Brawl'—'Governor's Lady Bashes Boy-Friend with Bottle in Luxury Bungalow'.

GEORGE: What do you want? What are you after?

PUNALO: I have already told you. To avoid a scandal and save the reputation of a gracious and charming lady.

GEORGE: Then why not give the clip back and say nothing about it?

PUNALO: The clip, as I have already said, is of no importance in itself. It only might be considered of value if it could be used as a lever.

GEORGE: Lever?

PUNALO: To prise loose perhaps a little of Your Excellency's political dogmatism.

GEORGE: Are you presuming to dictate to me, Punalo Alani?

PUNALO: Frankly, yes, and I am sure that when your immediate irritation subsides, you will be the first to see that I am in an admirable position to do so.

GEORGE: Now see here, Punalo Alani——

PUNALO (*disregarding him*): I will even go so far as to deliver an ultimatum.

GEORGE: You can deliver ultimatums until you are blue in the face, Punalo Alani, but I suggest that you deliver them by letter as I have no intention of tolerating this discussion for a moment longer.

PUNALO (*inexorably*): My ultimatum is this. Unless you give me your solemn promise as a man of honour that you will veto the Public Conveniences Bill, and in addition to that, withdraw your allegiance to the Samolan Socialist National Party at the forthcoming elections, I will show your wife's clip to the Press and, to coin a phrase, bust the works wide open.

GEORGE: I'll see you in Hell first!

At this moment SANDRA comes in with BOFFIN.

SANDRA (*with quiet defiance*): I have been for a drive, George, with Boffin. He has a stop-watch and we have kept a time chart in case there should be any misunderstandings afterwards. We left here in the Vauxhall

at eleven-five exactly. You can check that with the sentry, he was wide awake. We stopped at Caldwell's at eleven-thirty-two because Boffin wanted to buy a rubber sponge and some Eno's Fruit Salts. We left there at eleven-forty-two and arrived at the Royal Turtle Hotel at twelve-seven by the hotel clock and twelve-three by Boffin's watch. We had a very nasty rum punch each and left there at twelve-twenty-six, and here we are. Time please, Boffin.

BOFFIN (*looking at his watch*): One-ten.

SANDRA: Good morning, Punalo Alani. What a surprise to find you here. How is your son?

PUNALO: He regained consciousness at nine-five and was sick at nine-twenty-two.

GEORGE: Punalo and I are having a private conversation, Sandra.

SANDRA: In that case you should be in your office. This is a communal verandah. We can't sit in the hall, the drawing-room's covered in dust sheets, and the garden's too hot.

GEORGE: Sandra . . .

SANDRA (*ignoring him*): Ring for Sanyamo to bring the drinks, will you, Boffin? The bell's by the door.

BOFFIN: With all the pleasure in the world. I can still taste that beastly rum.

SANDRA: Have you asked Punalo Alani to stay to lunch, George?

GEORGE: No. I most certainly have not.

SANDRA: Then all I can say is that it's most inhospitable of you.

GEORGE: Punalo Alani came here to discuss business, Sandra. (*He looks at PUNALO.*) Very unpleasant business.

SANDRA: Well, there's a time and a place for every-

thing, even unpleasantness, and this isn't either. (To PUNALO.) You will stay, won't you?

PUNALO: You are very gracious, Lady Alexandra.

SANDRA: There's only curry, but there's masses of it.

PUNALO: I really think that perhaps I——

SANDRA: Of course if you don't like curry we could have an egg dish whipped up for you in a flash——

PUNALO: It was not because of the curry that I hesitated, Lady Alexandra, as a matter of fact I am exceedingly fond of it.

SANDRA: That's settled then. (To BOFFIN.) You've no idea how marvellously they do it here. It's the trimmings that make the whole difference. Chopped mangoes, grated coconut, sliced papaya, fried banana and little bits of bacon and kri-kri nuts—and you mash the whole caboodle into a sort of ambrosial dog's dinner and it's hot as hell and blows your head right off.

BOFFIN: I've always longed to have my head blown right off.

GEORGE: Come to my office, will you please, Punalo?

SANDRA (*firmly*): No, George—I really can't allow that. Once you get into that office there's no getting you out again. Lunch is practically ready now, and I don't want it ruined.

SANYAMO *comes in with the drink tray.*

BOFFIN (*going to it*): Thank God!

SANDRA: I hope there's a 'Westward Ho' in the shaker, Sanyamo?

SANYAMO: Yes, my lady.

SANDRA: Good. You can leave it, then. We'll help ourselves.

SANYAMO: Very good, my lady.

SANDRA (*to PUNALO*): 'Westward Ho' is our own

kala-kala speciality. I love kala-kala. It makes one so cheerful and uninhibited.

BOFFIN: The hair of the dog.

PUNALO: I have some of the old much-mellowed kala-kala in my cellars, Lady Alexandra. I would be delighted to send you a case if you would accept it. But I must warn you that it is very, very strong.

SANDRA: I had a feeling that it might be. Thank you, Punalo Alani. There is nothing I should like more.

CHRISTOPHER *comes in*.

CHRISTOPHER: Hali Alani is here, Lady A. He says he wants to speak to you privately and that it's very important.

SANDRA (*to SANYAMO, who is leaving*): Two extra for lunch, Sanyamo.

SANYAMO: Very good, my lady. (*He goes.*)

GEORGE: Well, I'll be damned!

SANDRA: You really must try to cultivate a little more social poise, George—World Revolution or no World Revolution. Bring Hali in, Chris. Tell him we can talk privately after lunch but certainly not before. I'm famished. (*To GEORGE, gaily.*) I might take him for a little walk in the garden—if he can stand up after last night!

CHRISTOPHER: All right, Lady A.

He goes.

BOFFIN (*handing round cocktails*): Cocktail, Mr. Alani?

PUNALO (*taking one*): Thank you.

BOFFIN: We haven't been officially introduced. My name is Blair-Kennedy.

PUNALO: I knew your father well, Mr. Kennedy. I was his fag at Eton.

BOFFIN: I do hope he was nice to you. He was

horrid to me. (*Offering a cocktail to GEORGE.*) George?

GEORGE: No, thanks. I don't approve of drinking in the middle of the day, and I don't approve of kala-kala at any time.

SANDRA: Don't say that, dear, when Punalo Alani is just embarking on it. You'll give him a guilt complex.

GEORGE: I should think his own conscience would do that.

SANDRA: Do relax, Georgel! You can be as cross as you like again after lunch, but do stop snarling now, there's a dear. (*She pats his arm affectionately.*) Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you, I met that scruffy little reporter from the *Daily Reaper* in the town. Just as we were coming out of Caldwell's.

GEORGE (*sharply*): What did you say to him?

SANDRA: Nothing much. He begged me with tears in his eyes to give him an exclusive interview.

GEORGE: What about?

SANDRA: Oh, I don't know. The Women's Federation, I expect, or the Hospital Fund, or some of my other island activities.

BOFFIN: They'd certainly make fascinating reading.

SANDRA: Be quiet, Boffin dear. (*To GEORGE.*) There's no need to look so stricken, George. I told him I never gave Press interviews and that he'd better talk to you. He's coming at four-thirty.

GEORGE: Then he can go away again.

SANDRA: It would be churlish to refuse to see him. Just fob him off with a few little anecdotes about your early struggles.

GEORGE: It's not my early struggles he wants to hear about, Sandra. It's your recent ones.

SANDRA (*sweetly*): Hush, George, I can see in your

eye that you are on the verge of being indiscreet.

HALI comes in. He looks far from well, and his head is bandaged. CHRISTOPHER follows him.

(Advancing to meet him.) How nice of you to come, Hali. Your father's already here. It's quite a family party, isn't it?

HALI (bowing as he shakes hands): I knew that my father would be here. That is one of the reasons that I came.

SANDRA (looking at his bandage): Poor Hali. You *did* get a wallop, didn't you?

HALI: There is much that I would say, but I cannot find words.

GEORGE: Of all the barefaced impertinence . . .

HALI: I appreciate the conflict that churns your breast, Your Excellency. I apologise with much humbleness. For my father I apologise also.

PUNALO (angrily): You are behaving like a fool, Hali. Please go home at once.

HALI (also angrily): Eimbalaaki lu Kokal

PUNALO: Hola awa-lali an kin moa. Lu sumpaali twaddidi.

HALI: Lu dabaani kokalo e bero liaki. Gonbaana Gonbaanal

PUNALO (violently): Somba Kalo um Doka! Somba Gulana koobl

SANDRA: Do speak in English, both of you. You sound like a Yugoslavian Drama Festival.

HALI: I apologise again, Lady Sandra. This time for the filthy manners both of my shameful father and myself.

SANDRA: It doesn't matter all that much, Hali. It's just that it's tantalising for us not to know what you're saying to each other.

BOFFIN: I can give a rough guess.

HALI: Another reason I came, Lady Sandra, was to bring you back your most pretty diamond and sapphire clip.

PUNALO (*involuntarily*): Halil

HALI (*ignoring him*): It was found in my car early this morning. (*He takes the clip from his pocket and hands it to SANDRA.*)

SANDRA (*taking it*): How thoughtful of you, Halil I can't thank you enough. I knew I must have dropped it somewhere. I'm always doing things like that. I once lost a pearl necklace in a street fight. Of course they weren't real pearls and it wasn't a real street fight—just a film première.

BOFFIN: It's the sentimental value that counts.

HALI: It is most dismal to lose something of sentimental value.

BOFFIN: Yes. Like India.

SANDRA (*holding up the clip to GEORGE*): Well, this is crammed with sentiment for me. Do you remember it, darling?

GEORGE (*grimly*): Only too well.

BOFFIN (*to HALI*): Would you like a cocktail?

HALI (*repressing a shudder*): No, thank you. I am upon the wagon.

PUNALO: That is good news, my son!

GEORGE: Better late than never.

SANDRA: Georgel

HALI (*looking fixedly at his father*): I have more good news also for my father. It will exhilarate him tip-top.

PUNALO: What is it, Halil?

HALI: The man who made the sharp violent attack on me and stole away my sweet car, has given himself up to the police.

PUNALO (*unmoved*): Which on the list? Number two or number three?

HALI: Number three. Unfortunately number two is in Honolulu.

PUNALO (*smiling at GEORGE*): Good. We have used him before. He is quite reliable.

BOFFIN: Imagine our excitement if only we knew what the hell they were talking about?

HALI: I do not like the dirty games, Father. You must please to explain to His Excellency that he has not the obligations of any sort.

PUNALO (*resigned*): That is understood, my son.

HALI: You will also make the lowest apology to His Excellency for your most naughty waste of his time.

PUNALO: That too is understood, my son.

GEORGE: Just a minute—— (*To HALI.*) Who is this man you say has given himself up?

PUNALO: He is a fanatic. He has already made several attempts to injure my son. Each time he has been imprisoned, and each time—strange enough—he has managed to make his escape. It is very disquieting.

SANDRA: I am grateful to you, Hali. For all the trouble you have taken.

HALI: I would make the most untold efforts to return myself into your best graces.

GEORGE: Does the Chief of Police know about this?

HALI: Yes. It was to him that the poor foolish fellow abandoned himself.

SANDRA: You put things so graphically, Hali. You will stay to lunch, won't you?

HALI (*looking at GEORGE*): Perhaps His Excellency

SANDRA: I am sure His Excellency will be enchanted.

I wonder if curry is good for concussion?

HALI: I have taken the liberty of bringing you a small gift, Lady Sandra. In the event that you would pardon my foolishness and no longer frown on me with displeasure. It is outside in the hall.

SANDRA: How very sweet of you, Hali. What is it?

HALI: It is an ancient native drum that was given to my father's great father by King Kefumalani.

SANDRA: How exciting! George, you must learn to play it after lunch. It will sort of release you.

HALI (*sincerely*): You have then really forgiven me?

SANDRA: Of course I forgive you, Hali. I hope too that you will forgive me.

BOFFIN: I'm still confused, but this is obviously a beautiful moment.

HALI: But Your Excellency, you still have the black look.

SANDRA: He can't help that. He comes from the Black Country.

GEORGE (*relenting*): Thank you, Hali. You have behaved exceedingly well. Which is more than I can say for your father.

PUNALO: "To err is human—to forgive, divine."

SANDRA: Pope again.

HALI: Born 1688. Died 1744.

SANYAMO (*entering*): Luncheon is served, Your Excellencies!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.